

SEARS, ROEBUCK AND COMPANY
MAIL ORDER PLANT

HABS No. IL-1187

Bounded by Lexington Street (north),
Grenshaw Street (south), Kedzie Avenue (east),
and Independence Boulevard (west)
Chicago
Cook County
Illinois

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPY OF MEASURED DRAWING

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Denver, Colorado 80225-0287

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDING SURVEY
SEARS, ROEBUCK AND COMPANY MAIL ORDER PLANT

HABS No. IL-1187

Location: Bounded by Lexington Street (north), Grenshaw Street (south), Kedzie Avenue (east), and Independence Boulevard (west)
Chicago, Cook County, Illinois

Quad: Englewood Quadrangle, Illinois - Cook County

UTM:
NE: 16.441400.4635570
SE: 16.441405.4635165
SW: 16.440280.4635160
NW: 16.440280.4635560

Chronology of Construction:
1905-1906
Merchandise Building (basement to ninth floor, Sections A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I)
Merchandise Building Annex A (basement to third floor, Sections J, K, L, M, N, O)
Merchandise Building Annex B (basement to third floor, Sections P, Q, R, S)
Printing Building (first to fourth floors)
Power House (basement and one story)
Administration Building (basement and two stories)
Paint Factory (basement and two stories)

1907
Carpenter Shop (two stories)
Old Garage (one story)
Garden and Pergola

1908
Men's Field House (one story)
Women's Field Houses (one story)

1909
Printing Building Annex (first to fourth floor)

1910
YMCA Building (basement and five stories)
Addition to Merchandise Building Annex A (fourth to ninth floors Sections J, K)
Addition to Merchandise Building Annex B (fourth to ninth floors Sections P, Q)

1911
Apartment Building (basement and two stories)
Fire Station (two stories)
Engine House (one story)

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1912

Box Factory (two stories)
Grocery Building (basement to sixth floor Sections
11 and 12)
Wall Paper Mill (first to fifth floor)
Central Park Building (five stories)
Property Building (five stories)

1913

Addition to Printing Building (one story portion
along tracks, at south side of Annex)
Standard Brands Building (two stories)

1913-1916

Addition to Merchandise Building Annexes (fourth
to ninth floors, Sections R, S)

1914

Addition to Administration Building (third through
fifth floors)
Addition to Printing Building (fifth and sixth floors)

1917

Addition to Administration Building, Service
Building (basement and first floor)
Addition to Merchandise Building (fourth to ninth
floors, Sections L, M, N)
Fillmore Street Garage (one story)

1918

Manufacturing Building No. 1

1919

New Paint Factory (basement to fifth floor)
Addition to Paint Factory (third and fourth floors)
Addition to Wall Paper Mill (first through fifth
floors)
Green House

1920 - 1930

Metal Cabinet Works (one story)
Garage (one story)
Storage Building
Service Station and Auto Parts Building
Warehouse
Garden Shop

1949

Allstate Building (basement plus ten stories)

Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant
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1964

Catalogue Operations Building
Tower Automotive Center
West Parking Deck (three levels)

1964-1969

East Parking Deck

Architects:

Nimmons and Fellows (George C. Nimmons and
William K. Fellows)
George C. Nimmons & Co
Nimmons & Co.
Nimmons, Carr & Wright

Engineers:

Adams and Schwab, Consulting Engineers (Martin
C. Schwab)
E.C. and R.N. Shankland, Structural Engineers

Builder:

Thompson Starrett Company

Present Owner:

Sears, Roebuck and Company
Hoffman Estates, Illinois

Present Occupant:

Sears, Roebuck and Company

Present Use:

Administration Building (3333 West Arthington
Street) - offices
Merchandise Building (924 South Homan Avenue) -
vacant
Printing and Advertising Building (3301 West
Arthington Street) - vacant
Power House (931 South Homan Avenue) - heating
Paint Factory (3350 West Fillmore Street) and Wall
Paper Mill (1012 South Spaulding Avenue and 3340
West Fillmore Street) - vacant
Allstate Building (3245 West Arthington Street) -
vacant
YMCA Building (3210 West Arthington Street) -
rehabilitation center

The Sears, Roebuck, and Company Mail Order Plant
was constructed for and has remained in use by
Sears, Roebuck and Company with exceptions as
follows. The YMCA Building is now owned by the
Safer Foundation, and is used as a rehabilitation
center.

Significance:

The Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant in Chicago was the primary facility of the nation's largest mail order and merchandise concern. The Mail Order Plant was originally constructed in 1905-1906, and consisted of the Merchandise Building, Administration Building, Printing and Advertising Building, Power House, YMCA Building, and Paint Factory. These buildings are all extant on the site today, together with the Wall Paper Mill (1912) and the Allstate Building (1949). The original buildings of the Mail Order Plant were designed by the nationally significant architectural firm of Nimmons and Fellows. Successor firms to Nimmons and Fellows, including George C. Nimmons & Co., Nimmons & Co., and Nimmons, Carr & Wright, designed later structures at the site.

The Sears catalogue offered everything needed for house, farm, and family to rural Americans in the early part of this century. From the Mail Order Plant in Chicago, millions of orders were sent across the country by rail and by truck, over a period of more than 80 years. After decades of successful growth, retail sales gradually replaced catalogue orders as the major portion of Sears, Roebuck and Company's business. The Chicago plant ceased mail order operations in 1987.

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Date:

April 20, 1994

History of Sears, Roebuck and Company

Context

Chicago provided the ideal environment for the development of Richard Sears' mail order company. Incorporated as a city on 4 March 1837, Chicago had grown rapidly in its first four decades. Its location made the city a center for transportation by water via the Great Lakes and the Mississippi River, and by rail between Eastern cities and the Western farms and ranches of the mid-century. The downtown was a bustling center of frame buildings with access to commerce through docks along the Chicago River. The city's population was more than 298,000 by 1870, and the metropolitan area was home to more than 400,000 people.

The great Fire of October, 1871, destroyed the central business district. However, Chicago became a place of even greater opportunity as the downtown was quickly rebuilt. It was this period of rapid growth, beginning after the Fire and continuing until World War I, that saw the founding and initial development of Sears, Roebuck, and Company in Chicago. Another major mail order concern, Montgomery Ward and Company, had established its offices in 1872, the year following the Fire. In that year, more than 300,000 square feet of office space opened in Chicago, and construction continued until the city offered nearly one million square feet of new office space by 1892. Innovations in building technology including steel structural framing, elevators, and plate glass, led to a downtown of highrise masonry and steel structures rather than wood. These new buildings were heated by steam boilers, and lighted by gas until 1887 when electric lighting became available. Water service and drainage were provided through cast iron pipe.

By the 1890s, 24 passenger-carrying railroads used stations in Chicago, with many of the major stations for national travel built during the 1880s and 1890s. For local transportation, the horsedrawn streetcars of mid-century were replaced by cable cars by the 1880s, and in 1888 the city's rapid transit system was instituted. These transit systems provided for access to the downtown from bedroom communities, and the suburbs began to burgeon. By 1900, the city's population was more than 1,698,000; ten years later the city had grown to a center of more than 2,185,000 persons.

It was in this environment of activity and progress that the firm of Sears, Roebuck and Company established its roots. By 1906, the company was situated in its new Mail Order Plant on the city's West Side, poised for growth into a national institution.

Founders of the Company

Richard Warren Sears was born on December 7, 1863, in Stewartville, Minnesota, and was educated at public schools. His father, a farmer-blacksmith, lost his money in a stock farm and died in 1878. The young Sears left school and learned telegraphy in order to support himself, his mother, and sisters. He went to work for the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad. In 1886, at age 23, he was earning \$6 per week as the telegrapher and station agent for the railroad in the North Redwood station, near Redwood Falls, Minnesota. Sears supplemented his income by trading lumber, coal, and other commodities with local settlers and native Americans.

The inception of Sears' career as a mail order entrepreneur began when he obtained for half price a cash-on-delivery express shipment of watches that a local jeweler had refused. He was able to buy the watches for \$12 and sell them for \$14 rather than the usual price of \$25. Sears sent samples to other agents along the railroad, who began to sell for him. After six months, he had made \$5,000 in this business.¹

Sears then left railroading and moved to Minneapolis, where he founded the R.W. Sears Watch Company. He used express agents for selling because they were bonded, but also began to advertise through letters, circulars, and periodicals. To furnish repairs to watches, Sears hired watchmaker Alvah Curtis Roebuck in 1887. In addition to watches, Sears began to offer other merchandise including jewelry through the mail.

In 1889, Sears sold his business for approximately \$100,000 and moved to Iowa to become a banker. Part of Sears' agreement for the sale of his business was that he would not sell watches under his own name for three years. Within a year, he had decided against a new career in banking, and had returned to Minneapolis. There he founded a watch and jewelry firm, the Warren Company, and rehired Alvah Roebuck in 1891.

In 1892, the firm that was to become Sears, Roebuck and Company was incorporated as A.C. Roebuck, Inc. In 1893, the three-year restriction that prevented Sears from selling watches under his own name ended, and the firm was renamed Sears, Roebuck and Company with Richard Sears as president. The early years of the firm, and Sears' role in its development, are discussed below. In 1895, Sears married Anna Lydia Meckstroth, and the couple had four children.

One of Sears' biographers has commented that Sears "was one of the great promotional geniuses in American business history," but that he was also "a poor businessman and an inept manager."² None the less, it is Sears' successes that are remembered, as together with his partners he developed his fledgling mail order watch business into one of the largest and best known merchandise companies in the world.

Sears served as president of the company until November 21, 1908, when he resigned after disagreements with his partners. He served as chairman of the board, and then as director until November 26, 1913. His health was poor in his later years. Sears spent his later years farming in Waukesha, Wisconsin, until his death at age 51 on September 28, 1914.

Alvah Curtis Roebuck was born January 9, 1864, in Lafayette, Indiana. He learned watch repair through a correspondence course. By age 23, he was earning \$3.50 per week and board by operating a watch repair shop in a Hammond, Indiana, delicatessen. In 1887, Roebuck was hired by Richard Sears as a watch repairman for Sears' mail order business.

Roebuck has been described as gentle and quiet, Sears as energetic and dynamic. Roebuck was loyal to Richard Sears and to the company through the years in which Sears left the business to try banking in Iowa, and the following decade of success in which chaos ruled

¹ Tom Mahoney, *The Great Merchants* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1947), page 218.

² James C. Worthy, *Shaping an American Institution: Robert E. Wood and Sears, Roebuck* (Urbana, Illinois and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1984), page 21.

the company's operations. However, by 1895, Roebuck was no longer comfortable with Sears' management of the firm, and sold his portion of the business to Sears.

Roebuck remained employed by the firm as head of the watch department. He later formed a company that manufactured stereopticons, motion-picture projectors, and typewriters. Roebuck sold that firm for \$150,000 in 1925 and settled in Florida, where he became a real estate entrepreneur. After the Florida land boom collapsed, Roebuck returned to Chicago and again worked for Sears beginning in 1933. In the following year, he began to make special appearances in retail stores, a practice which continued until his death in 1948 at age 84. As his biographers have noted, Roebuck did not attain the wealth that Richard Sears or Julius Rosenwald garnered; on the other hand, he lived a much longer life and enjoyed better health than either Sears or Rosenwald.

Julius Rosenwald was born August 12, 1862, in Springfield, Illinois, where his parents were German immigrants and his father had a clothing business. By the age of 11, Rosenwald had found work as a peddler. At age 16, after two years of high school, he went to work for two of his uncles in their wholesale clothing business, Hammerslough Brothers, in New York City.

By age 21, Rosenwald had a growing retail clothing business on Fourth Avenue in New York City. Through his business, he recognized a need for clothing manufacture for sales to mail order firms, and decided to return to Chicago to pursue this line of business. In October, 1885, Rosenwald, his brother Morris, and their cousin Julius Weil leased a loft in the Farwell Building in Chicago and began to manufacture men's summer clothing under the firm name, Rosenwald & Weil.

In 1890, Rosenwald married Augusta Nusbaum. Their son Lessing was born in 1891; the couple later had another son and three daughters. Augusta Nusbaum's brother, Aaron, was to be instrumental in setting up the partnership of Rosenwald with Richard Sears. Lessing Rosenwald was to succeed his father as chairman of the board at Sears, Roebuck, and Company. Julius Rosenwald's involvement in the evolution of Sears, Roebuck and Company is described below.

After joining Sears, Roebuck and Company, Rosenwald devoted his adult life to the business he called "the store," with the exception of the years of the First World War. In 1916, President Woodrow Wilson appointed Rosenwald as a member of Advisory Commission of the Council of National Defense, where he served as chairman of the committee on supplies. When the council was taken over by the War Industries Board, Rosenwald became involved in other war-related work until 1919. Even when he visited the troops in France, Rosenwald brought Sears, Roebuck and Company catalogues for them to read.

Rosenwald was devoted to his mother, and visited her every day on his way to work.³ He was as well known for his philanthropic efforts as for his successes in business. It was said of Rosenwald, "He is a good Samaritan, a humanitarian.... Whenever Julius Rosenwald gives,

³ George F. Redmond, *Financial Giants of America*, Volume 1, (Boston: The Stratford Company, 1922), page 101.

he gives like a king."⁴ In 1912, on his fiftieth birthday, Rosenwald made charitable contributions of \$700,000 including \$250,000 to the University of Chicago, \$250,000 for a Jewish Charity building on west side of Chicago, \$50,000 for a social workers' country club near Chicago, and \$25,000 for Tuskegee Institute programs. In March, 1917, Rosenwald gave the American Jewish Relief Committees a matching donation of \$1,000,000.

Inspired by reading *Up from Slavery* and by meeting Booker T. Washington, Rosenwald supported programs to improve the quality of life for black Americans. In 1911, he offered \$25,000 toward construction of a YMCA for blacks to each community that raised a matching fund of \$75,000 by public subscription within five years. More than 12 cities qualified. He established many public schools for blacks in the South by providing partial funding and encouraging community funding between 1917 and 1932. He also served as a Trustee of Tuskegee Institute.

In 1917, Rosenwald established the Julius Rosenwald Fund. When the Fund was reorganized in 1928, all funds were to be spent within 25 years of endower's death. When Rosenwald died on January 6, 1932, at the age of 69, his estate was valued at \$17 million, less than his philanthropic commitments. Within 25 years, the Fund realized its goal.

Robert Elkington Wood was born in Kansas City, Missouri, on June 13, 1879. He studied engineering at West Point, from which he graduated in 1900. In 1908, Wood married Mary Butler Hardwick, and the couple had five children. Wood served as a lieutenant of cavalry during the Philippine insurrection from 1900 until 1902. From 1905 through 1915, he worked on the Panama Canal as quartermaster and director of the Panama Railroad Co. Wood retired from the service in 1915, but saw active service again during the First World War. He became a brigadier general under Major General George W. Goethals, the quartermaster general, and received a Distinguished Service Medal.

In 1919, Wood became vice president of merchandising for Montgomery Ward. With the advent of automobile transportation, he urged the establishment of retail stores. Differences with the president of Montgomery Ward led Wood to offer his services to Sears, Roebuck and Company. In 1924, Julius Rosenwald hired Wood as vice president of Sears. Wood was largely responsible for the successful expansion of Sears through retail stores across the country. His role in the evolution of the firm is discussed below.

In 1928, Wood became president of the company, and in 1939 chairman of board. Under Wood's leadership, Sears stock increased 1,082 percent over 25 years.⁵ Wood was interested not only in the prosperity of the firm, but in the welfare of its employees, noting that "Business must account for its stewardship not only on the balance sheet but also in matters of social responsibility."⁶ Wood retired from the firm in 1954, and died on November 6, 1969.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 93.

⁵ Worthy, *Shaping an American Institution: Robert E. Wood and Sears, Roebuck*, page 37.

⁶ Mahoney, *The Great Merchants*, page 233.

Founding and Early Years (1892-1907)

On April 6, 1892, the firm that Richard Sears founded was incorporated as A.C. Roebuck, Inc.; Sears was still prohibited from selling watches under his own name by the agreement he had made when he moved to Iowa to work in banking several years earlier. In the new firm, Sears held 499 shares, Roebuck held 250 shares, and Sears' sister Eva held one share. Sears was president, Roebuck secretary-treasurer, and the three shareholders served as directors. On September 16, 1893, the three-year limit against Sears using his own name in the business ended, and the firm became Sears, Roebuck and Company.

The new firm occupied rented quarters in the Globe Building in Minneapolis.⁷ In 1893, Richard Sears also opened a branch office and shipping depot in Chicago. The new company carried an expanded line of goods. Planning, merchandising, and advertising were carried out by Sears with assistance from Roebuck. Other employees in the firm included women clerks; occasionally a man was hired for a special project.⁸ Sears' promotional efforts met with success, and net sales increased from \$276,980 in 1892, to \$388,464 in 1893, to \$393,323 in 1894.⁹

In 1894, Richard Sears was introduced to Julius Rosenwald by Rosenwald's brother-in-law, Aaron E. Nusbaum. Nusbaum had made \$150,000 through having the soft drinks concession at the Columbian Exposition of 1893. Nusbaum met Richard Sears when he offered the mail order entrepreneur a pneumatic tube system in which he was an investor.¹⁰ Rosenwald's firm was already providing wholesale clothing to Sears for mail order sales. Sears valued his business at \$140,000; Rosenwald and brother-in-law each paid \$35,000 to become partners in the company.¹¹

The firm was reincorporated under Illinois law on August 23, 1894, with Sears as president, Rosenwald as vice president, and Nusbaum as treasurer and general manager. Sears was primarily responsible for advertising and sales promotion, Rosenwald for merchandise line and administrative work, and Nusbaum for finances and some administration. Sears owned 800 shares of the company's stock, and Rosenwald and Nusbaum each owned 350. (By 1898, the three principals owned 500 shares each.)¹²

⁷ The Globe Building was an eight-story masonry office building in Minneapolis. *Hudson's Directory* of 1893 listed the building at 16-18 South Fourth Street, on the present site of the Public Library. The Globe Building survived until demolition circa 1957.

⁸ Boris Emmet and John C. Jueck, *Catalogs and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1950), page 135.

⁹ M.R. Werner, *Julius Rosenwald: The Life of a Practical Humanitarian* (New York and London: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1939), page 219.

¹⁰ Mahoney, *The Great Merchants*, page 220. It does not appear from archival documentation that Sears purchased the pneumatic tube system offered by Nusbaum.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Mahoney, *The Great Merchants*, page 219.

In January, 1895, Sears' Minneapolis and Chicago offices were consolidated in a five-story building at 171, 173, and 175 West Adams Street in Chicago. The firm had 80 employees, and sales in 1895 were \$745,595, nearly double that of the previous year. Despite the increasing sales, profits did not grow as rapidly, probably due to the great disorganization in receiving, handling, and shipping goods. Sears concentrated on increasing sales, at which he was very successful, but did not implement an organized system to keep up with growing sales. Employees were expected to work a great deal of overtime without extra pay. Working conditions were crowded and dirty. As a result, workers were apathetic, turnover was frequent, and many errors occurred in filling and sending orders. One historian has compared Sears and his workers in the early years of the business to a sorcerer and his apprentices.¹³ The chaos and disorganization were too much for Alvah Roebuck, who sold his shares in the company to Sears for \$25,000 soon after the company moved to Chicago.¹⁴

By 1896, the growing firm needed more space, and moved to a building at corner of Fulton and Desplaines Streets, with Elmer Scott as general manager. However, even the new building was too small as orders continued to increase. Storage space was rented in various buildings in different parts of the city, making shipping and receiving increasingly difficult. The firm had four separate shipping departments: in the Monarch Building at Desplaines and Halsted; in the Bradley Building on Jefferson Street; and on the fourth and sixth floors of the main building at Fulton and Desplaines. The Bicycle Department was located at Fulton and Halsted; the Grocery Department on four floors and the basement of a building west of Desplaines on Fulton; and the Binder-twine Plant in the Bradley Building. Receiving incoming goods was a problem, since incoming freight had to remain on sidewalks if enough had not been shipped out to make room for the new goods.¹⁵ Even with these difficulties, sales in 1896 were almost double those of the previous year.

Julius Rosenwald was determined to improve both the manner of business and the quality of merchandise offered by Sears, Roebuck and Company. Influenced by the success of Montgomery Ward and Company, Rosenwald encouraged the expansion of a range of merchandise carried by Sears. By 1896, the Sears catalogue carried general merchandise including clothing, wagons and buggies, harnesses, farm equipment, plumbing supplies, household furnishings, dishes, dry goods, watches, jewelry, firearms, sewing machines, bicycles, and musical instruments. Prices were guaranteed to be "below all others" and merchandise was guaranteed.

¹³ Lawrence P. Bachmann, "Julius Rosenwald." *American Jewish Historical Quarterly*, Volume 66, page 92.

¹⁴ Mahoney, *The Great Merchants*, page 219.

¹⁵ Letter from R.P. Moffott, July 19, 1918, to Julius Rosenwald. Moffott started work at Sears, Roebuck and Company on March 31, 1896.

Various employees developed systems to facilitate the mail order process. C.D. Palmer, who came to company in 1898 as bicycle correspondent and retired in 1928 as office manager, developed a system of form letters to respond to customer correspondence.

In 1897, the firm had 475 employees. By the following year, 700 were employed, and in 1899 the number of employees had more than doubled, with 1,720.¹⁶ With the growth in number of employees, rules for behavior were developed in 1898 and were not substantially changed for many years. These rules emphasized discipline, timeliness, and attention to work. General manager Elmer Scott, who was acquainted with Jane Addams of Hull House, instituted early employee welfare efforts. In 1899, the Seroco Club was formed to improve department managers' understanding of their staffs and responsibilities. The annual publication, *Seroco Topics*, was initiated, and the club met to discuss employee relations and training.¹⁷

By 1900, Sears had surpassed Montgomery Ward and Company with more than \$10 million in sales, and by the following year 2,500 persons were working for the firm. The firm advertised widely, but the main selling tool was the catalogue written by Richard Sears. Sears emphasized a close rapport with customers, offering guarantees, low prices, return policy, and customer service. For many years, response letters to customers were even handwritten to provide a more personal response. Despite increasing sales, disagreements between Sears and Nusbaum led to Nusbaum's resignation on February 14, 1901. Sears and Rosenwald bought Nusbaum's interest in the firm for \$1,250,000. Sears remained president; Rosenwald became vice president and treasurer, and attorney Albert Loeb became secretary of the firm. Loeb, of the law firm of Loeb and Adler, had played an increasingly important role in the firm since his law office had handled reorganization of the company in 1894.

In 1902, the firm opened a New York buying office to execute orders from Chicago. This office was headed by Robert P. Sniffen, later a director of the firm.

The employee publication, *The Skylight*, first appeared in 1901. This publication announced employees club activities and meetings; most employee clubs were primarily social. *The Skylight* was at first published twice monthly, and by 1904 was published once each month. In May 1902, the Seroco Mutual Benefit Association was organized to provide employee insurance. Within four years, this organization had over 3,000 members.¹⁸ In the same year, the firm initiated first aid and general health services for employees.

Other amenities for employees included free coffee served in the departments beginning in 1902. The company made arrangements with the Chicago Public Library to circulate books. Sears employees could purchase coal at wholesale prices. The Employees Savings Department, opened by January, 1903, offered a savings plan with five percent interest. As general manager, Scott eliminated night work and Sunday work in 1902, regarding those work hours as unproductive and bad for employees. Overtime work was discouraged, and no additional pay was offered. However, when overtime was sometimes required by special circumstances, employees could take time off in slower seasons. In general, the emphasis of personnel policy was on self-improvement and individual initiative. In 1904, Scott initiated a plan to provide a training school for employees.

¹⁶ Werner, *Julius Rosenwald: The Life of a Practical Humanitarian*, page 69.

¹⁷ Emmet and Jueck, *Catalogs and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company*, page 135.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, page 141.

By 1904, the company had outgrown its old quarters on Fulton and DesPlaines Streets. Its goods were distributed wherever warehouse space could be obtained in Chicago. The process for receiving and shipping goods was complicated and difficult. Shipments were transferred to and from the Sears offices and railheads, express companies, and the post office by horse-drawn wagons. Traffic stoppages occurred at the various rented buildings, with waiting in the street for loading and unloading of goods. By 1904, the express companies threatened not to take the firm's business because its operations were so chaotic.

Sears, Roebuck and Company under Julius Rosenwald (1908-1932)

While Richard Sears concentrated on bringing in more business, Julius Rosenwald wanted to bring order out of the chaos of the company's order handling and shipping procedures. Rosenwald's desire was realized through planning and construction of the Mail Order Plant on Chicago's West Side, as discussed below. The new, highly efficient system for purchasing, receiving, handling, and shipping merchandise allowed the already-successful firm to grow at an even faster rate. In 1905, the year in which part of the new plant was first occupied, sales reached \$37,879,422.¹⁹

Upon the advice of Rosenwald's friend Henry Goldman of Goldman, Sachs and Company, in New York, Sears, Roebuck and Company issued preferred stock on June 16, 1906. Sears and Rosenwald each received \$4,500,000 in cash for their stock. The preferred stock was listed on the New York Stock Exchange immediately; common stock was listed by 1910. In 1906, the year in which the completed Chicago plant went into operation, the firm had 9,290 employees on site and sales were more than \$50,000,000.²⁰

In the financial panic of 1907, Sears, Roebuck and Company's sales dropped by nearly \$10 million and profits by 37 percent. By 1908, the firm experienced financial difficulties due at least in part due to Sears' scheme of giving customers coupons which could be redeemed for expensive premiums, a program opposed by Rosenwald and others. In response to lower sales and profits, Sears wanted to increase advertising; Rosenwald objected. General manager Louis Asher and merchandise manager J. Fletcher Skinner, both of whom had been appointed by Sears, also opposed Sears' plan. The partners also disagreed over Sears' decision to open a Dallas branch. As a result of these differences, Sears resigned as president on November 21, 1908. He served as chairman of the board chair, and then as a director, until November 26, 1913. Sears eventually sold his stock in the company for \$10,000,000.

Following Sears's resignation in 1908, Rosenwald became president of the firm. Rosenwald based his leadership of the company on a philosophy of business: "Treat people fairly and honestly and generously and their response will be fair and honest and generous. Sell honest merchandise for less money and many people will buy. Sell for less by buying for less."²¹ Rosenwald also supported lowering profits on individual sales while increasing aggregate profits through a larger number of sales.

¹⁹ Emmet and Jueck, *Catalogs and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company*, page 130.

²⁰ Werner, *Julius Rosenwald: The Life of a Practical Humanitarian*, page 69.

²¹ Mahoney, *The Great Merchants*, page 225.

Rosenwald's leadership of Sears was not that of an autocrat. He encouraged department heads to pursue new ideas, and was described as taking "a fatherly interest in the welfare of the thousands of employes (*sic*)...."²² He dined in the company dining rooms, where men and women had separate tables. Although he was not able to remove saloons from the vicinity of the plant, Rosenwald created a rule that no worker could enter one. A 1907 personnel manual entitled, *Sears, Roebuck and Company and Their Employees*, warned employees of "the evil of drink, the futility of smoking, the necessity of morality, and the virtue of diligence and thrift."²³ By that year, employee services included night school, restaurants, an in-house medical staff and hospital, discounts on purchases, and paid vacation time, among other benefits.

Rosenwald was successful. The branch office opened at Dallas was continued, and new branches were established at Seattle and Philadelphia. The firm continued to expand and improve its merchandise. A testing laboratory was opened to evaluate goods. When the firm could not purchase items that it wanted to sell, it began to manufacture them, including farm implements, pianos, and stoves. In 1910, sales reached \$40,000,000.²⁴

Rosenwald made it a goal to raise the standards of business, including improvements in the accuracy of advertising, and a policy of "your money back if not satisfied." The business rapidly expanded, and extended lines of goods were carried. Agricultural prosperity also contributed to a rise in the buying power of farmers. The advent of the parcel post system in 1913 benefitted the mail order business by reducing shipping costs. Sears, Roebuck's sales increased to \$100,000,000 in 1914.

In 1916, Julius Rosenwald set up "The Savings and Profit Sharing Pension Fund of Sears, Roebuck and Co. Employes (*sic*)." Each year, an employee was permitted to contribute five percent of his earnings up to \$500. Sears, Roebuck contributed a fixed percentage of pre-tax net profits to the fund. Participation in the fund was voluntary; more than 90 percent of employees enrolled.²⁵

By 1919, the Mail Order Plant had its own Medical Department with a doctor in charge, eight assistant doctors, and 13 nurses who assisted at the plant and provided home visits. The department also had its own clerical staff, and an 18-room hospital on the ninth floor of the Merchandise Building. The Medical Department's work was organized into five areas: medical supervision before and after employment, surgical supervision, dental supervision, sanitary (educational) supervision, and medical welfare work.

By 1919, the principal catalogue was 1,200 pages in length. Sears was manufacturing many of the goods sold, and operated ten shoe factories, a stove factory, and factories for pianos, wall paper, paint, cameras, buggies, wagons, and agricultural machinery, among other

²² Redmond, *Financial Giants of America*, page 100.

²³ Emmet and Jueck, *Catalogs and Counters: A History of Sears, Roebuck and Company*, page 145.

²⁴ Ralph J. Christian, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form for Sears, Roebuck and Company Complex, History section.

²⁵ Mahoney, *The Great Merchants*, page 233.

goods. In that year, sales reached \$234,242,337, with profits of more than \$18,000,000, and 40 percent of the stock was divided.²⁶

By the early 1920s, a number of factors began to conspire against the company's success. In the financial panic of that year, farm prices also began to fall, resulting in lower buying power of farmers. In the Spring of that year, a buyers' strike also occurred. Small mail order houses failed. In 1920, Sears, Roebuck and Company's sales rose to more than \$245,000,000, but profits fell to about \$11,700,000.²⁷ From a high in 1919, sales fell to \$254,595,000 in 1920, and to \$178,000,000 in 1921, approximately the same figure as 1917. The firm reduced the number of employees from more than 21,000 in 1920 to just over 18,000 by 1921, but business still suffered. Goods were overstocked and could not be sold. Finally, Rosenwald pledged \$20,000,000 of his own fortune to the company; this gesture was noted on the front page of the *New York Times*. Business improved and debts were paid. By 1922, Sears, Roebuck and Company had recovered its financial status.

After the panic of 1920, Rosenwald appointed his brother-in-law Max Adler as head of merchandising. The overstock was liquidated and buying practices controlled. As the business again expanded rapidly, a larger assortment of goods was carried. The firm established more factories, with approximately 20,000 employees overall.²⁸ The variety and quality of merchandise available began to increase. For example, Sears began to carry shoes made in its own factory. Sears, Roebuck and Company also offered *Encyclopedia Britannica*, and later the *American People's Encyclopedia*. There was also a Sears Readers Club, echoing the library services provided in early years to employees.

In 1923, the Sears-Roebuck Agricultural Foundation was created, with the motto: "to help you farm better, sell better and live better." The foundation sponsored educational programs, farm assistance programs, broadcasts, and films, and later expanded to include 4-H Club activities, scholarships, and other types of community service.²⁹ Sears' Farm Service Division was directed by a Mail Order Farm Advisor.

In 1924, Rosenwald selected Charles M. Kittle, executive vice president of the Illinois Central Railroad, as the new president of the company. Rosenwald also brought in General Robert E. Wood, formerly vice president of merchandising for Montgomery Ward and Company, as vice president of Sears, Roebuck. Had Rosenwald known of Wood's availability first, he might have selected Wood in place of Kittle, given Wood's experience in merchandising for another major mail order firm.

During the 1920s, mail order firms faced difficulties as the population shifted from the rural setting to urban centers. The advent of automobiles made it possible for customers to travel

²⁶ *Ibid.*, page 226.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ George C. Nimmons, "Modern Industrial Plants, Part VII," *The Architectural Record*, Volume 45, Number 6, May, 1919, page 512.

²⁹ Mahoney, *The Great Merchants*, page 233.

to stores, and new chain stores provided competition. The solution for mail order companies was to establish retail stores.

In 1925, under the direction of Wood and Kittle, Sears, Roebuck and Company entered the retail store business. The first Sears retail store opened in the Chicago mail order plant on February 2, 1925. In that year, 95.5 percent of the company's more than \$258,000,000 in sales came from mail order, while 4.5 percent came from retail. The retail portion of sales grew steadily, and after 1931 accounted for more than half of all sales.³⁰

Other Sears retail stores were opened in outlying areas to take advantage of lower rentals while providing ready access by automobiles. By this plan, these stores anticipated modern shopping centers.³¹ Sears retail stores varied from carrying a full line of merchandise to concentrating on furnishings and appliances, or farm equipment and catalogue sales, depending upon the location of the store.

In 1928, Kittle died unexpectedly at age 46 after only three years with the firm. Rosenwald selected Robert Wood as president; Doering and Adler resigned. However, Rosenwald's choice was justified by the increasing growth and prosperity of the firm under Wood's direction.

A description of the company written in the mid-1920s³² emphasized the prosperous, bustling nature of the business as well as the importance of the Mail Order Plant. At that time, more than 50,000,000 catalogues were sent out annually; approximately 130,000 orders reached the four stores each day. In addition to the various merchandise departments, the Mail Order Plant featured a laboratory for testing goods; an examining and pressing room for clothing; showrooms for jewelry, shoes, pianos, phonographs, rugs, furniture, and plumbing supplies; and a Grocery Department with a wide variety of foodstuffs.

Radio Station WLS, (named after the "World's Largest Store"), had its studio in the Tower of the Merchandise Building. This 500 watt station, operating on 345 meter wave length, also had a station at the Hotel Sherman in Chicago. In keeping with Sears' role in the lives of farm families, WLS broadcast agricultural talks, national debates on farm issues, and educational programs.

By the late 1920s, Sears had offices in New York, Berlin, and London, as well as across the United States. With Theodore V. Houser, who came from Montgomery Wards to Sears, Roebuck and Company in 1928, Robert Wood initiated Sears' manufacture and sales of automobile tires. After a competition to select a name, the new brand was called "Allstate." This name was also applied to automobile supplies, accessories, and in 1931, to auto insurance concern and later its companion firm, Allstate Fire Insurance. Another success

³⁰ Mahoney, *The Great Merchants*, page 227.

³¹ Ralph J. Christian, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form for Sears, Roebuck and Company Complex, History section.

³² *A Visit to Sears, Roebuck & Co.: Chicago, Philadelphia, Dallas, Seattle* (Chicago, Illinois: Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1924).

was the Coldspot electric refrigerator, for which the final design was prepared by renowned industrial designer Raymond Loewy.

The Depression Years and World War II

On July 6, 1931, Sears entered banking with the creation of the Sears-Community State Bank. In the same year, a central personnel department development was established at the Chicago plant. One year later, Julius Rosenwald died; he was succeeded as chairman of the board by his son Lessing.³³

As more retail stores were added, Sears, Roebuck and Company was able to prosper through the Depression of the 1930s. Despite fluctuations, annual sales by 1937 were \$537,242,400.³⁴ By 1938, the Mail Order Plant employed approximately 50,000 persons, although technological improvements allowed fewer men to handle the same number of orders.

During the Depression years, additional amenities were developed for employee welfare. The monthly picture newsletter, the *News-Graphic*, began publication in 1936. And in 1939, Sears, Roebuck and Company instituted an independent research organization for employee welfare.

During World War II, many employees went into the armed services and many factories converted to war work, but the war only slowed the growth of the firm slightly. The Sears company newsletter featured articles on the activities of employees in the service, and the Mail Order Plant's garden won a Victory Garden competition sponsored by the *Chicago Sun*.³⁵ The expansion of the network of retail stores continued to bring added prosperity. In 1942, Sears opened a retail store in Havana, Cuba, beginning an expansion of its retail network into Latin America and South America.

By the mid-1940s, the Mail Order Plant had 9,500 workers at the site and issued 15 million catalogues annually. The plant had its own post office, telephone system, hospital, service station, and park. The plant's fire department had 21 volunteer employee fire companies. Amenities for employees at the plant included music played for half hour periods twice in morning and twice in the afternoon. Sears employees could order catalogue items to be delivered to their desks; 3,000 items were ordered in this manner each day.³⁶

By 1947, sales had reached \$3,000,000,000 per year. Of every \$100 spent in the United States for general merchandise in that year, \$5 went to Sears, Roebuck and Company.³⁷

³³ Mahoney, *The Great Merchants*, page 227.

³⁴ Werner, *Julius Rosenwald: The Life of a Practical Humanitarian*, page 69.

³⁵ "Sears Garden Wins with Victory Crop," *Sears News Graphic*, Volume II, Number 9, October 21, 1943, pages 1 and 9.

³⁶ "A City in a Store," *Popular Mechanics*, May, 1943, pages 40-41, ff.

³⁷ Mahoney, *The Great Merchants*, page 216.

Post-World War II Years

Beginning in 1952, Sears entered business in Canada as a partner of the firm Robert Simpson Company, Ltd. The new firm was called Simpson-Sears Limited, and provided both mail and retail sales. In 1954, Theodore V. Houser became chairman of the board.

By 1964, Sears had surpassed the A&P (Great Atlantic and Pacific Tea Co., Inc.) grocery chain as the world's largest retailers. By 1973, Sears, Roebuck and Company had 837 retail stores, 12 catalogue order plants, and 2,647 catalogue and telephone sales offices. Sales were more than \$11 billion per year, with catalogue sales only 22 percent of that total.³⁸

The peak of operations at the Sears, Roebuck, and Company Mail Order Plant occurred in the late 1960s or early 1970s. In 1974, Sears headquarters moved its offices to the 100-story Sears Tower at 233 South Wacker Drive in downtown Chicago. The decline in catalogue sales in comparison to retail sales, the opening of other Sears facilities across the country by mid-century, and the relocation of the company's headquarters all contributed to a lessening of importance of the Mail Order Plant. In 1987, the Merchandise Building closed, and the mail order portion of the business at the Chicago Plant ended.

The Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant

Planning and Design

In a 1904 letter describing the proposed construction with regard to insurance requirements, Richard Sears wrote:

We have procured a piece of property about three miles directly west of our City Hall (Center of city). The property is 537 feet wide and one-half a mile long,...in one of the best residence districts of our city....We are planning to erect a building of mill construction, the main part of the building covering an area of about 300 to 400 feet, with a large court in the center, and adjoining each building will be two long two-story buildings....Our power plant will be in a separate building, made fire-proof....We will install such reservoirs for water and such facilities for conveying water, such watch service, independent fire fighting organization, and equipment as will give us the greatest protection....These buildings when completed will be occupied by us in the handling and shipping of all kinds of merchandise, and the value of the goods that will be carried in these buildings will at times be in excess of \$5,000,000.00.³⁹

³⁸ Ralph J. Christian, National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form for Sears, Roebuck and Company Complex, History section.

³⁹ Letter from Richard Sears to Mr. Jno. A. Freeman, President of the Mutual Insurance Co. in Providence, Rhode Island, November 30(?), 1904. Sears noted that the site proposed for new construction was three miles west of the city center; in fact, it is five miles west of the center of downtown.

The site of the new Sears Mail Order Plant was a tract of land about five miles west of the city center, two blocks wide and half a mile long, comprising 41.6 acres in all. The location was selected for its ready access to transportation, along railroad lines which connected more than 30 railroads with Chicago. It was also adjacent to residential neighborhoods where the employees would live. Space was available for expansion and for outdoor amenities. The architect summarized the advantages of the site:

The erection of this great plant furnished an opportunity of designing and planning a plant specially adapted to this particular business, on vacant ground with plenty of room and no obstacles to interfere with whatever arrangement and design seemed best for the purpose.⁴⁰

The requirements for the new plant included a merchandise building where goods could be stored and shipped; an administration building; a printing plant; and various amenities including an outdoor recreation area. The architects and client spent a year in preliminary study and site selection. Approval was obtained from the city to close a street to provide a continuous site, 1,250 feet (381 meters) long by 340 feet (104 meters) wide, for the new Merchandise Building.

Julius Rosenwald personally negotiated with the architects and contractors for the new plant. He selected Nimmons and Fellows as the architects; the firm had designed his home at 4901 Ellis Avenue in Chicago in 1903, and had also designed a house for Richard Sears in Grayslake, Illinois.

In an article explaining the process of design for the Mail Order Plant, the architects noted that in order to design the site and buildings for greatest economy, efficiency, and safety, the buildings were organized into three groups based on three divisions of business: advertising and printing; administration; and merchandise storage, handling, and shipping.⁴¹ Nimmons felt that the distinct processes of work should be organized in separate rooms or separate buildings. The flow of production should follow a direct path, without obstacles. The processes and work pattern would determine the design.

In 1919, Nimmons wrote:

Mistakes in the management or operation of a plant can usually be corrected without material disturbance to the business, but mistakes in the plan, arrangement, or design of the buildings require, as a rule, a "major operation," in order to put the plant in a healthy, growing and efficient state of development. The plan and design of the buildings fix to a certain extent the character of the future business, just as certainly as the mould determines the casting when the metal is poured. The plan and design for

⁴⁰ Nimmons, "Modern Industrial Plants, Part VII," page 508.

⁴¹ [George C.] Nimmons and [William K.] Fellows, "Designing a Great Mercantile Plant," *The Architectural Record*, Volume XIX, Number 6, June, 1906, page 3.

each building should therefore be made perfect before beginning its construction.⁴²

The site design and aesthetics of the architecture were also of special interest. The architects noted that:

Sears, Roebuck & Company are as much interested as is anyone in maintaining the character of the neighborhood. It will ultimately become the place of residence of their employees, and they are keenly alive to the effect of pleasant surroundings upon the moral and physical well-being of the people who work for them.⁴³

The exterior brickwork of the buildings was selected to be a rich, dark red brick with terra cotta trim, and the design was said to have been inspired by the architecture of Tuscany. The lunettes and frieze of Merchandise Building tower, the "book mark" ornament of the Printing Building, and the medallions of the Power Plant were glazed white and blue terra cotta. The frieze on the Administration Building was reportedly inspired by the marble inlay of San Miniato at Florence.

The park-like treatment of the site, with its landscape park, "will add wonders to the attractiveness of the whole place and not infrequently exert an invaluable influence on the morale of the entire working force."⁴⁴

Construction

When plans for the new plant were published in trade papers, Louis J. Horowitz of the Thompson-Starrett Company of New York traveled to Chicago to offer the firm's services. Horowitz offered a bid of \$250,000 for construction. He offered to sign a contract for a construction fee of only \$1; if Rosenwald was not satisfied with completed work, Sears, Roebuck and Company would only need to pay the cost of materials plus \$1. An agreement was finally drawn up for a fee of \$40,000, and the contract was signed on December 22, 1904.⁴⁵

Ground was broken on January 24, 1905. Approximately 7,000 men worked on construction of the new plant. Each day 60 freight car loads of building materials were used. The contractor later reported that 23,000,000 bricks were used in construction. Several of the buildings were of mill construction. The order for yellow pine timber placed on January 11, 1905, was reportedly the largest in history of the trade, requiring 13,545,576 board feet of

⁴² George C. Nimmons, "Modern Industrial Plants: Part III - Plans and Designs," *The Architectural Record*, January 1919, page 27.

⁴³ Nimmons and Fellows, "Designing a Great Mercantile Plant," page 411.

⁴⁴ George C. Nimmons, "Modern Industrial Plants, Part IV," page 168.

⁴⁵ Werner, *Julius Rosenwald: The Life of a Practical Humanitarian*, page 70.

lumber.⁴⁶ The terra cotta for the buildings was fabricated by the Northwestern Terra Cotta Co., which had offices at 1000 Clybourn Avenue in Chicago in 1905.

The Merchandise Building was completed by October, 1905. The entire plant was turned over to Sears, Roebuck on January 15, 1906, and on January 22, 1906, the company moved its operations to the new facility. The move from downtown Chicago to the new plant was made in approximately 200 wagons over a period of about one and one-half weeks. Merchandise was moved across the city, even as shipping continued uninterrupted at the offices. When the wagons arrived at the new plant, the adjacent streets were unpaved and few sidewalks had been constructed, but the Merchandise Building was ready for operations.⁴⁷

When construction was completed, Rosenwald issued three checks, the first for the agreed sum of \$40,000, an additional fee of \$210,000 to cover actual costs, and a bonus of \$50,000 for the excellence of the work. The cost of construction was \$4,282,000; including equipment, the cost of construction of the new plant was \$5,600,000.⁴⁸

Buildings completed in the original, 1905-1906 construction program included the Merchandise Building and its Annexes, the Administration Building, the Power House, the Printing and Advertising Building, and the Paint Factory. The adjacent park was developed soon after the buildings.

The Architects, Engineers, and Builders

The firm of Nimmons and Fellows was responsible for the design of the original buildings of the Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant in Chicago, including the Merchandise Building and its Annexes, the Administration Building, the Printing and Advertising Building, the Power House, and the Paint Factory.

George Croll Nimmons, FAIA. George Croll Nimmons was born in Wooster, Ohio, in 1867 and educated at the local academy. After graduating, he studied architecture in Europe. Nimmons returned to the United States and in 1885 entered the office of Burnham & Root in Chicago as a draftsman. In 1897, he formed a partnership with William K. Fellows, as described below. In 1898, Nimmons married Justine V. Wheeler, and the couple had three children. The partnership of Nimmons and Fellows lasted until 1910. From 1910 until 1917, Nimmons practiced privately as principal of George C. Nimmons & Co., and from 1920 until 1933 as principal of Nimmons & Co. His work in this period in Chicago included the Franklin Building (1912), the C.P. Kimball & Co. Building, the Reid, Murdoch & Co. Building (1913), and the Adams Schaaf Building (1916), and the Union Special Machines Company (1918). During the 1920s, his work in Chicago included the Kelley Building (1921) and the American Furniture Mart (1923, 1926). From 1933, Nimmons was senior partner in

⁴⁶ Theodore Starrett, "The Making of a Great Mercantile Plant," *The Architectural Record*, Volume XIX, Number 4, April, 1906, page 272.

⁴⁷ Letter from R.P. Moffott to Julius Rosenwald, July 19, 1918.

⁴⁸ Letter of August 2, 1939, to A.C. Roebuck at Sears from G.C. Nimmons at Nimmons, Carr & Wright. (See also Werner, *Julius Rosenwald: The Life of a Practical Humanitarian*, page 74.)

the firm of Nimmons, Carr & Wright, with George W. Carr and Clark C. Wright, as described below. Nimmons retired in 1945, and died on June 17, 1947.⁴⁹

During and after his tenure with Nimmons and Fellows, Nimmons published extensively, including articles on the design of several of the Sears, Roebuck buildings across the country. He was the author of a series of articles on "Modern Industrial Plants" in *The Architectural Record* in 1918 and 1919.⁵⁰ Nimmons also wrote essays on the future of concrete, and an introduction to a college textbook entitled "The Significance of the Fine Arts."⁵¹

William Kinne Fellows, FAIA. William K. Fellows was born on September 3, 1870, in Winona, Minnesota, where he received his early education. Fellows studied at the Columbia University School of Mines and Architecture, and trained in architectural offices in New York City. He also studied for 18 months in Europe on a traveling fellowship. Fellows returned to the United States, where he settled in Chicago and established a firm with George C. Nimmons in which he practiced from 1897 until 1910, as described below. In 1898, Fellows married Elizabeth Steele. From 1911 until 1925, Fellows practiced with John L. Hamilton and Dwight Perkins in the firm Hamilton, Fellows & Perkins. This firm specialized in school architecture, and designed high schools at Bay City, Michigan (1918); Manitowoc, Wisconsin (1922); and Evanston, Illinois. Fellows also designed several buildings for University of Nanking in China. After 1925 and until retirement, Fellows practiced privately. He died on August 8, 1948.⁵²

The firm Nimmons and Fellows was established in 1897 and continued until 1910. Best known for large commercial structures, one of the firm's first major commissions of this type was the Sears & Roebuck plant on the West Side of Chicago. One of their most successful works, this work led to the firm's later receiving commissions to design buildings for Sears, Roebuck in several Midwestern cities in the early twentieth century.

Among the other major works by the firm in Chicago are the Bailey Building (south portion, 1898); the Leshar Building (1902), the Stratford Building (1907), the Arthur Dixon Building (1908), and the Railway Terminal Building (1909), as well as buildings for Sears, Roebuck

⁴⁹ Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970), page 442.

⁵⁰ George C. Nimmons, "Modern Industrial Plants," Part I, *The Architectural Record*, Volume 44, Number 5, November, 1918, pages 414-421; Part II, December 1918, page 531-550; Part III, January 1919, pages 27-44; Part IV, February 1919, pages 148-168; Part V, March 1919, pages 262-282; Part VIa, April 1919, pages 343-355; Part VIb, May 1919, pages 450-470; and Part VII, June 1919, pages 506-525. Part VII deals specifically with the Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant in Chicago.

⁵¹ George C. Nimmons, Introduction to *The Significance of the Fine Arts* (Committee on Education of the American Institute of Architects and the Committee on Architecture and Art of the Association of American Colleges, published by the Marshall James Company, 1923).

⁵² Henry F. Withey, and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects*, page 206.

and Company in Seattle, Washington, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and Kansas City, Missouri, among other locations. The firm also designed a residence for R.W. Sears residence in Grayslake, Illinois, in 1906,⁵³ and a residence for Julius Rosenwald in Chicago in 1903.⁵⁴

After 1910, George C. Nimmons practiced as principal of George C. Nimmons & Co. (1911-1917) and Nimmons & Co. (1917-1928). He continued to design for the Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant. Buildings of this period include the additions to the Merchandise Building Annexes.

The firm of Nimmons, Carr & Wright, established in 1928, was the successor firm to Nimmons and Fellows, George C. Nimmons & Co., and Nimmons & Co. Nimmons, Carr & Wright was responsible for later construction at the Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant, including the Allstate Building (1949). Nimmons, Carr & Wright also designed buildings for Sears, Roebuck and Company at other locations, including the Sears, Roebuck and Company Building at Elliott and Lake Streets in St. Paul (1927), which is still extant.

George Wallace Carr was born in 1879 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. He studied design and engineering at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Armour Institute of Technology. After three years of travel and study abroad, Carr joined the firm of Pond & Pond in 1899. In 1914, Carr became associated with the firm of George C. Nimmons & Co., later Nimmons, Carr & Wright. Carr retired from the firm in 1949. He resided in Highland Park, Illinois, and died in 1958.⁵⁵

Clark Chittenden Wright, AIA, was born on July 3, 1880, in Libertyville, Illinois, and educated at Beloit College in Wisconsin. Like George Carr, he studied architecture and engineering at the Art Institute of Chicago and the Armour Institute of Technology in Chicago. In 1915, Wright began his career as a draftsman in the office of George C. Nimmons in Chicago. By 1933, he became a partner in the firm of Nimmons, Carr & Wright. Wright was in charge of structural work on many large buildings including the Sears, Roebuck and Company buildings in Chicago, Philadelphia, and other cities; the Allstate Building at the Sears Mail Order Plant in Chicago; the Chicago Beach Hotel in Chicago; and the Portland Cement Company Research Laboratories in Skokie, Illinois.⁵⁶ Wright died on October 12, 1948.

After Nimmons' death in 1947, the firm continued as Carr and Wright, Inc., Architects-Engineers.

⁵³ Richard W. Sears Residence, Grayslake, Illinois, *Inland Architect and News Record*, Volume 47, Number 6, July, 1906.

⁵⁴ H. Allen Brooks, *The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and His Midwest Contemporaries* (New York, New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1976), pages 55-56.

⁵⁵ Obituary of George Wallace Carr, *The Chicago Tribune*, March 26, 1958.

⁵⁶ Henry F. Withey and Elsie Rathburn Withey, *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects*, page 672.

Dunlap & Esgar, Inc. The firm was responsible for design of parking garages at the Mail Order Plant.

R. (Robert) Rea Esgar was born on August 24, 1905, in Bozeman, Montana. He was educated at Gallatin Co. High School in Bozeman, and attended Graceland College in Lamoni, Iowa, for one year. Esgar received a B.S. in Architecture from Montana State College at Bozeman in 1927, and a M. Arch. degree from Harvard University in 1930. After working as a draftsman for the firm of Fred E. Wilson in Bozeman during college, he worked for Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch & Abbott in Boston from 1929-1940 as a draftsman, and from 1944-1946 as an architect. Esgar also worked as architect and chief architect for Chas. T. Main, Inc., in Boston, from 1940-1944. Beginning in 1946, he was a principal with Nimmons, Carr & Wright (Carr and Wright, Inc.) in Chicago. During that time, Carr and Wright had offices at 333 North Michigan Avenue.

Projects with which Esgar was involved while with Coolidge, Shepley, Bulfinch & Abbott included Logan International Airport in Boston; the Plant Pathology Building at the Rockefeller Institute for Medical Research at Princeton, New Jersey, New York Hospital and Cornell Medical Center in New York City; Lowell House, Elliot House, the Chapel, and various buildings at Harvard University in Cambridge, Massachusetts; and the George Robert White Memorial Building for Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston. While working at Chas. T. Main, Inc., during World War II, he served as Chief Architect for the Duck River Plant for the Chemical Warfare Service, constructed in Columbia, Tennessee; 30 residences at the Holston Ordnance Works at Kingsport, Tennessee; and various buildings at Camp McCain, Grenada, Mississippi. Esgar died on December 12, 1966.

Leonard Eugene Dunlap was born on April 15, 1893, in Savoy, Illinois. He was educated at Urbana High School, and graduated from the University of Illinois at Champaign in 1917. Dunlap worked as a draftsman in Chicago for the Illinois Central Railroad from 1917 to 1919; for the Sinclair Oil Company Engineering Department in 1919; and for George C. Nimmons & Co. (Nimmons & Co.) from 1919 to 1921. From 1921 to 1927, he was in charge of the drafting department for the Kalman Steel Company, Distribution Engineering Department, in Chicago. In 1927, he rejoined the firm of Nimmons & Co. (Nimmons, Carr & Wright), where he listed his position as "in responsible charge of work." Dunlap remained associated with the firm after 1947, when it was reorganized as Carr and Wright, Inc.. Dunlap died in 1976.

Although research in local archives did not provide any definite evidence that Dunlap and Esgar was a successor firm to Nimmons, Carr & Wright, and Carr and Wright, Inc., it is likely that the connection existed because both Dunlap and Esgar held positions of responsibility with the previously-named firms by the late 1940s. It is of interest that from 1905, with the design of the original Mail Order Plant by Nimmons and Fellows, through the 1960s, with the design of several parking garages at the Mail Order Plant by Dunlap and Esgar, Sears, Roebuck and Company appears to have employed a single architectural firm and its successors.

Consulting engineering services for the Mail Order Plant were provided by the firm of **Adams and Schwab** of Baltimore, with the work continued by **Martin C. Schwab**, principal of the firm, after he moved to Chicago in 1905. Adams and Schwab provided the design for the elaborate conveyance systems of the Merchandise Building, and mechanical systems for the Power House and other buildings at the Mail Order Plant.

Martin Constan Schwab was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1880, and attended the local Polytechnic Institute. He graduated in engineering from Johns Hopkins University in 1896. In 1904, Schwab married Besse Wiesel and the couple had two daughters. In addition to his engineering work, Schwab was also nationally known as a collector of Chinese, Egyptian, and Persian art objects.

As a consulting engineer, Schwab assisted in the electrification of the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad in 1896. He was later appointed consulting engineer for the Maryland Electric Co., and was active in the rebuilding of Baltimore after the Fire of 1904. He served as consulting engineer for the Soldier's Home in Washington, D. C., and for buildings in Washington, Philadelphia, and New York, while a principal in the firm of Adams and Schwab.

In 1905, Schwab moved to Chicago and established the firm of Martin C. Schwab. He served as consulting engineer for the Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant, where his work included the design of extensive conveyance systems for the Merchandise Building. To Schwab on this project are attributed the development of the first high speed and horizontal assembly lines, and the first use of air conditioning in an administration building with sealed windows.⁵⁷ He also participated in the design of the WLS Broadcasting Station at the Merchandise Building.

Schwab served as consulting engineer for the electrification of drainage canals in Chicago and for the Illinois State Board of Administration (1913). He was involved in construction of the Bell Building, Mallers Building, Michigan Square Building, Adler Planetarium, Harris Trust & Savings Building, Corn Exchange National Bank, Hotel Sherman, Morrison Hotel, Mandel Brothers Building, Rothschild's Store, Lytton Stores, 30 North Michigan Avenue, 333 North Michigan Avenue, and various Yellow Cab Bus properties in Chicago; the General American Tank Car Corporation in East Chicago, Indiana; Union Station in Kansas City, Missouri; and the Baumberger Department Store in Newark, New Jersey. He also served as consulting engineer for the Julia Lathrop Government Housing Project in Chicago.⁵⁸ Schwab held patents for various devices developed for building construction. He was involved with construction of buildings in 150 cities in 43 states, and was active in various charitable organizations and clubs. Schwab died on January 2, 1947.

The firm of E. C. and R. M. Shankland provided civil engineering services for the buildings of the original Mail Order Plant.

Edward Clapp Shankland was born on August 2, 1854, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He was educated at public schools in Dubuque, Iowa, and studied civil engineering at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Troy, New York, from which he graduated in 1878. (Edward Shankland received an honorary M.A. from Cornell College at Mt. Vernon, Iowa, in 1904.) In 1881, Edward Shankland married Harriet Graham; the couple had two children. From 1878 until 1883, Edward Shankland worked for the United States government on improvements to the Missouri and Mississippi Rivers. From 1883 until 1889, he was

⁵⁷ Obituary of Martin C. Schwab, *Baltimore Sun*, January 4, 1947. This notice included a general description of Schwab's work; however, references to the names and locations of specific projects mentioned were not provided.

⁵⁸ *Who Was Who in America*, Volume 2.

engaged in structural work on bridges at Canton, Ohio. From 1889, he worked primarily in the design of steel structural systems for buildings, serving as an engineer for the firm of Burnham & Root (D.H. Burnham & Co.) until 1894. During the years 1891 through 1893, Edward Shankland was engineer of construction and chief engineer of the works for the World's Columbian Exposition. In 1898, he founded the firm of E.C. and R.M. Shankland, Civil Engineers, with his brother, as discussed below. The firm specialized in designing steel structural systems for buildings. In 1896, Edward Shankland received the Telford gold medal and Telford premium from the Institute of Civil Engineers for his paper on steel skeleton construction in Chicago.

Ralph Martin Shankland was born on September 8, 1863, in Dubuque, Iowa. He studied civil engineering at the University of Michigan, graduating in 1888. In 1890, Ralph Shankland moved to Chicago, where he was employed in the engineering department of Burnham & Root (D.H. Burnham & Co.) until September, 1898. In 1894, Ralph Shankland married Justine M. McNeil, and the couple had one son. Beginning in 1898, he practiced civil engineering with his brother in the firm, E.C. and R.M. Shankland.

The firm of E.C. and R.M. Shankland was very well known for its work in Chicago and elsewhere. In addition to the Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant, the firm served as structural engineers for the Coliseum Building, LaSalle Street Station, an addition to the Fisher Building, and the Corn Exchange National Bank in Chicago, on which Martin Schwab had also worked; the Tennessee Trust Building in Memphis; the Union Bank Building in Winnipeg, Manitoba; and a palace for the Crown Prince of Japan in Tokyo.

Thompson Starrett Company. The Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant was constructed by the Thompson Starrett Company of New York. Theodore Starrett (1864 - 1917), founder of the company, lived in Prospect Plain, New York. He came from a literary family; his mother was editor of a woman's magazine. However, with his brothers Paul and William, Theodore Starrett was always involved in building construction. In his youth, he worked in the offices of Burnham and Root, as had George C. Nimmons and Edward and Ralph Shankland. His work as a contractor included the erection of many large structures in Chicago, New York, and Toronto.⁵⁹ Starrett published various articles about his work, including an article about construction of the Sears Mail Order Complex in *The Architectural Record* in 1906.

In addition to the Sears complex, work of the firm in Chicago included the Tribune Tower (1923 and 1925), and the Bismarck Hotel (1926), the Palmolive Building (1929).

⁵⁹ Obituary of Theodore Starrett. *The Western Architect*, Volume 26, Number 5, November, 1917.

Architectural Information

The site of the Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant is on the west side of Chicago, approximately five miles west of the city center. The site is bounded by Lexington Street on the north, Grenshaw Street on the south, Kedzie Avenue on the east, and Independence Boulevard on the west. Generally, Arthington Street and Homan Avenue form the key access streets for the site.

There are seven extant buildings at the Mail Order Plant: the Merchandise Building (including Annexes, Grocery Building, and Box Factory), Administration Building, the Printing and Advertising Building, the Power House, the Paint Factory and Wall Paper Mill, the YMCA Building, and the Allstate Building.

The architectural character of all of the buildings is similar, with the exception of the Allstate Building. The six older buildings are red brick with terra cotta trim. All are approximately four to nine stories in height, with the exception of the Tower of the Merchandise Building which is 14 stories. The Allstate Building is a ten-story building designed in a modern utilitarian style; however, its exterior brick facades and simple fenestration relate well to the facades of the older buildings.

In general, the buildings of the Mail Order Plant are in good condition and well maintained. Masonry, roofing, and drainage systems are generally in good condition. In those buildings not currently in use, the windows at the lower floors have been boarded over.

At this writing, the Merchandise Building is scheduled to be demolished in 1994 to provide space for a new residential development. Portions of the building are only in fair condition, with localized deterioration of exterior masonry, roofing, and interior finishes from water penetration. A localized structural failure of a timber roof beam has occurred at the ninth floor, Section D, due to rotting of the wood from water penetration. The bridge leading from the west elevation of the Grocery Building to the Property Building (demolished) was removed, and the area of masonry that opened to the bridge at the Grocery Building is deteriorated.

Original Phase of Construction (1905-1910)

Prior to construction of the Mail Order Plant, the area where the complex was to be built was almost completely undeveloped.⁶⁰ Only about one-half dozen structures existed in the area bounded by Lexington Street, the Baltimore and Ohio Railroad tracks, Central Park Avenue, and Kedzie Avenue. South of the railroad tracks, there was sparse residential development. On either side of each block, about six, one or two-story frame or masonry dwellings had been constructed, thus only about one-third of the lots plotted had been built upon by that date. A few industrial and commercial structures existed in the area during the 1890s, including a blacksmith shop and the Roberts Ironworks, located near the northeast corner of the St. Louis Avenue and Fillmore Street.

⁶⁰ Sanborn Fire Insurance map, vicinity of Arthington Street and Homan Avenue, 1896.

The Metropolitan West Side Elevated Railroad, an electric railway, extended west from the city center between Harrison and Fluornoy Streets by the 1890s. A station was located at the intersection of this rail line with St. Louis Avenue.

When the Mail Order Plant opened in 1906, the buildings of the original phase of development included the Merchandise Building and its Annexes, the Administration Building, the Printing and Advertising Building, the Power House, and the Paint Factory. With the exception of the Power House, all of these buildings were substantially enlarged by the construction of additions over the next decade.

In 1907, the Garden and Pergola were completed across from the Administration Building. In the same year, the Shop and Old Garage were added to complex. During the following year, the Men's Field House and Women's Field House were constructed. In 1909, the Printing Building Annex was constructed as an addition to the Printing and Advertising Building. In 1910, the YMCA Building was completed, and the Merchandise Building was expanded through construction of additional floors at the Annexes.

These buildings are described below.

Merchandise Building (1905-1906)

The Merchandise Building is located at 924 South Homan Avenue, on a site bounded by Arthington Street on the north, the Baltimore and Ohio railroad tracks on the south, Homan Avenue on the east, and Central Park Avenue on the west. The shape of the building is an elongated "U." The overall dimensions of the east portion of the building are 450 feet (137 meters) by 312 feet (95 meters), with the central shipping court measuring 230 feet (70 meters) by 81 feet (25 meters). The tower was 50 feet (15 meters) square in plan. Annex A, the south annex, is 706 feet (215 meters) by 115 feet (35 meters) in plan. Annex B, the north annex, is 462 feet (141 meters) by 115 feet (35 meters) in plan. At the west end of Annex B, the Grocery Building is 327 feet (100 meters) by 130 feet (40 meters) in plan, and the Box Factory is 235 feet (72 meters) by 85 feet (26 meters) in plan. The front facade of the building faces east.

As constructed in 1905, the Merchandise Building consisted of a nine-story building surrounding a central court, with each of the Annexes three stories in height above a basement. The east portion of the building included the basement through ninth floors of Sections A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, and I. The Annexes, as originally constructed, included the basement through third floors of Annex A, Sections J, K, L, M, N, and O, and Annex B, Sections P, Q, R, and S. Between the two annexes, the train shed extended 60 feet (18 meters) in width and more than 400 feet (122 meters) in length.

The Tower, which was 50 feet (15 meters) square in plan and 225 feet (69 meters) tall, was of fireproof masonry construction. The Tower accommodated tanks that held 200,000 gallons of water for the sprinkler fire suppression system in tanks. Water mains were located in tunnels under the buildings. The top story of the Tower was used as an observation area and rest room for visitors.

In 1910, the Merchandise Building Annexes were expanded by construction of fourth through ninth floors in Annex A, Sections J and K, and Annex B, Sections P and Q. In 1912, the two-story Box Factory was constructed adjacent to the south facade at the west end

of Annex B. Also in 1912, the Grocery Building was constructed at the west end of Annex B, between the existing Annex and the Box Building as Sections 11 and 12 of Annex. The Grocery Building consisted of a basement and six floors. Between 1913 and 1916, the Merchandise Building Annexes were further expanded by the addition of fourth to ninth floors in Annex B, Sections R and S. In 1917, fourth to ninth floors were added to Annex A, Sections L, M, and N, and O.

The exterior facades are red brick with simple terra cotta trim. Regular rows of large windows provide a maximum of natural light to the work spaces within. The central Shipping Court was skylighted. The Tower at the east end of the building provided a visual landmark for the entire complex. The top of the tower was ornamented with blue and white terra cotta surrounding arched openings on each facade. The main entrance to the building is at the base of the Tower on the east facade. Secondary entrances are located along the north, south, and west facades. Loading docks are located along the south half of the east facade, and at intervals along the north and south facades. The interior, courtyard facades are similar to the exterior facades, with ornamentation consisting only of terra cotta lintels and sills. Railroad and truck access is from the west, between the two Annexes.

The main building and annexes are constructed of mill (timber) construction, with some of the later additions to the annexes having steel and concrete structural systems. The Grocery Building and Box Factory have concrete structural systems. The building is heated by steam radiators. The Tower, and the fourth through sixth floors of the Grocery Building, are air conditioned. The building is fully sprinklered.

The building was designed to house the merchandise storage, order handling, and shipping facilities for the Mail Order Plant. A review written at completion of the building stated, "This is one of the most important business buildings ever constructed in this country...it is to house a commercial plant of extraordinary extent and complication..."⁶¹ By 1918, it also housed a U.S. Postal Substation and Express Company offices. Forty cars could fit in the skylighted train shed, where more than 120 car loads could be filled each day. The Tower of the building housed scientific laboratories for testing of wearing apparel, textiles, rubber and leather goods, fertilizers, drugs, paints, oils, and food products. The Grocery Building provided seven acres of floor space, with special heating, cooling, and ventilation systems, and areas for storage of foods at different temperatures.

The Merchandise Building was equipped with an extensive system elevators, conveyors, and seven spiral chutes to transport incoming merchandise to storage areas; to move merchandise through the order filling process; and to prepare outgoing merchandise for shipping. This equipment remained in use, with minor modifications and additions, until closing of the facility in 1987.

The Merchandise Building has also been known as the Chicago Mail Order Building or the Chicago Mail Order Offices.

⁶¹ "Notes & Comments: The Sears-Roebuck Building," *Architectural Record*, Volume 18, Number 8, August, 1905, pages 167.

Administration Building (1905-1906)

The Administration Building is located at 3333 West Arthington Street, on a site bounded by Arthington Street on the north, the Power House and the Printing and Advertising Building Annex on the south, the Printing and Advertising Building on the east, and Homan Avenue on the west. The building is of masonry construction, l-shaped in plan, and measures approximately 436 feet (133 meters) by 141 feet (43 meters). The principal facade faces north, and the secondary street facade faces west.

The Administration Building was originally constructed with two stories above a raised basement. In 1914, the Administration Building was enlarged by the construction of the third through fifth floors. In 1917, the Service Building addition, consisting of a basement and first floor, was added at the rear.

The exterior walls of the Administration Building are red brick with white glazed terra cotta trim. Terra cotta elements includes the base of the building on the street facades, window pilasters and surrounds at the building corners, continuous belt courses above the second and fifth floors, sills, pier bases, and trim. The principal entrance at the center of the north facade is set within a pedimented portico. Terra cotta entablatures carry the words, "Sears Roebuck Co." and "Administration Building." A secondary street entrance is located at the center of the west facade. The building has wood glazed doors, and wood-framed, double-hung windows. The building has a shallow sloped, inverted membrane roof (originally slate), with skylights.

Several one-story entrance structures have been added to the building, as well as a large, one-story red brick structure housing Commonwealth Edison Substation vaults at the center of the south elevation. A metal-clad enclosed walkway at the second story level of the east elevation connects the Administration Building to the Printing and Advertising Building.

Original interior spaces include the vestibule and lobby, which have terrazzo floors and stairs, and marble wall cladding. Sears promotional literature noted that, "In quiet elegance we doubt whether this lobby is excelled in any building in the City of Chicago."⁶² The principal corridors on the first floor also retain their original terrazzo floors and marble wainscots. At the lower floors, the stairs are terrazzo with ornamental newels and rails. The executive offices on the first floor also retain original finishes. Most of the other interior spaces in the building have been renovated. An escalator was added by 1910.

The structural system of the building is masonry and steel. The Administration Building has steam radiators and is air conditioned. It has a heat sensor fire alarm system.

⁶² "Lobby of the Administration Building," stereopticon slide, Sears, Roebuck and Company Archives, circa 1908. Around 1908, Sears, Roebuck and Company produced a set of 50 stereo views which were available to customers for 50 cents a set. These stereopticon slides featured views of the Mail Order Plant and employees at work, including the Administration Building and gardens, Mr. Sears at his desk, receptionists at the Long Distance Telephone Switchboard, the Automatic Telephone Switchboard in basement of Administration Building, a Pneumatic Tube Station, and the main dining room in the basement of the Administration Building.

The Administration Building originally housed executive offices and the clerical force which received mail and dispatched orders to the Merchandise Building. On the first floor were located the Auditing and Banking Departments. The headquarters of Seroco Mutual Benefit Association and Employees' (*sic*) Savings Department were also located within. Sears promotional literature noted that, "This beautiful building with its large, well lighted and perfectly ventilated offices, is an ideal office structure, with every convenience and every office appliance designed to facilitate the prompt and accurate handling of the business transacted here."⁶³ The second floor housed the Mail Opening and Mail Auditing Departments, and the Correspondence Division, where 7,000 letters were handled each day by 1910. The building also contained a Recreation Room and Library.

Most of the restaurant facilities were located in the basement of the Administration Building; a cafeteria was also located in the basement of Merchandise Building. By 1908, five restaurants in the Administration Building, including Men's and Women's Cafeterias, a Grill Room, and a Dining Room, provided meals for 9,000 employees. Lunches were taken in shifts. The restaurants, which employed 100 workers, could feed 8,400 people in 1 hour and 20 minutes. Promotional material noted that all of the restaurants passed inspection by health authorities, and that "Every appliance, every convenience known to modern methods in the preparation of food is in use in this restaurant."⁶⁴ In 1910, a meal consisting of two sandwiches, coffee or milk, pie, cheese, and fruit could be purchased for nine cents. A separate cafeteria was available to employees who brought their own lunch.⁶⁵

By 1918, departments housed in the building included Mail Opening and Cash Entry; Order Sorting; Entry Department, with 500 typists; Scribing Department, where labels were prepared by 300 clerks; Index and Routing, where records were kept; Distribution Department, which prepared shipping schedules for the various departments; Correspondence Department, with secretaries taking dictation and typing; Catalog Addressing Department, where 400 employees and 12 motor-driven addressing machines prepared address labels for 65 million catalogues by 1917. By the 1920s, the Administration Building processed 70,000 letters per day. A Medical Department was later added at the east end of the second floor of this building. The Administration Building has continued to be used for offices throughout its history.

Printing and Advertising Building (1905-1906)

The Printing and Advertising Building is located at 3301 West Arthington Street, on a site bounded by Arthington Street on the north, the Baltimore and Ohio railroad tracks on the south, Spaulding Avenue on the east, and the Administration Building and Power House on the west. The building is L-shaped in plan. The original portion of the building measures 86 feet (26 meters) by 310 feet (95 meters) in plan. The west wing (Annex)

⁶³ "A Glimpse of the Administration Building" and "The Administration Building from the Pergola," stereopticon slides, Sears, Roebuck and Company archives, circa 1908.

⁶⁴ "Main Dining Room Seroco Restaurant," stereopticon slide, Sears, Roebuck and Company archives, circa 1908.

⁶⁵ "The Girls' Cafeteria," stereopticon slide, Sears, Roebuck and Company archives, circa 1908.

measures 120 feet (37 meters) by 177 feet (54 meters) in plan. The front facade of the building faces north.

As originally constructed, the Printing and Advertising Building was four stories in height. The Annex to the Printing and Advertising Building was constructed in 1909 as a four-story structure adjacent to the south half of the west facade of the original building. In 1913, a one-story addition was constructed along the railroad tracks, at the south side of the Annex. In 1914, fifth and sixth floors were constructed on the Printing and Advertising Building. In the following year, fifth and sixth floors were added to the Annex portion of the building.

The exterior facades of the Printing and Advertising Building are constructed of brick with brick, white-glazed terra cotta, and stone trim. Brick ornament includes piers on the front elevation, inset arches above the windows, and corbels above the second floor on the east wing and above the first and fourth floors on the west wing. Terra cotta trim includes window sills, a belt course above the first floor and above the fourth floor, and details including pier capitals and "bookmark" medallions above the fourth floor. The windows are wood-framed double-hung units.

The main entrance to the building is at the center of the north elevation of the east wing. There is a secondary pedestrian entrance and a vehicular entrance at the south end of the east facade, and a loading dock at the south side of the west elevation of the main portion of the building. On the east elevation, the Printing and Advertising Building is connected to the Allstate Building by a covered metal-clad passageway at the second floor level.

The original portion of the building is mill construction, with brick partition walls and steel roll-down doors between bays. The Annex has concrete columns and beams, with brick partition walls at fire stairs. The building has a flat roof that is presently covered with an inverted membrane roofing system. The building has steam radiator heat and air conditioning. It is completely sprinklered. The interior of the building has been substantially modified.

The Printing and Advertising Building was constructed to house the printing, binding, and electrotyping plant. From 1903 until 1923, the company printed its own catalogues at the Mail Order Plant. By 1912, more than 30 million pieces of advertising matter were produced each year. The main product was the General Catalogue, which at that date was 1,000 pages in length and weighed four pounds. The Building had 23 web perfecting rotary presses, and could produce 7 million catalogue pages per hour, using four carloads of white paper daily.

By 1918, the Printing and Advertising Building produced 6,500,000 large catalogues, special sales books, and other mailings each year. Its departments included the Composing Room, where 300 workers set type; the Press Room, where rotary presses could produce 8,000,000 catalogue pages per hour; four-color rotary multi-color presses; the Art and Engraving Department; the Electrotype Foundry and Finishing Room, where printing plates were made; Gathering and Binding machines that could bind 2,000 catalogues per hour; and Trimming Machines, which could trim 2,000 books per hour. Wrapping and shipping were also completed from the building.

After 1923, it became more economical to have the catalogues printed at outside plants. However, design and printing of other advertising material and preparation for mailing of catalogues continued on site. By the late 1940s, the company was printing two large and five small catalogues per year, with 11 regional editions. Approximately 50 million catalogues were printed and mailed each year.

The building was then used to house the merchandise testing and development program, previously located on the tenth floor of the tower in the Merchandise Building. After printing operations and advertising ceased at this building, it was used to house the testing laboratories that formerly occupied the Tower of the Merchandise Building. After 1961, the Printing and Advertising Building was known as Merchandise Development and Laboratory Building, a function it had held for some time.

Power House (1905-1906)

The Power House is located at 931 South Homan Avenue, on a site bounded by the Administration Building on the north, the Baltimore and Ohio railroad tracks on the south, the Printing and Advertising Building Annex on the east, and the Homan Avenue on the west. The Power House is a tall, single story space above a basement, and also has a mezzanine level. It measures 144 feet (44 meters) by 250 feet (76 meters) in plan. The front facade of the building faces west.

The exterior walls of the Power House are red pressed brick with brick and terra cotta trim and courses. Decorative terra cotta medallions are set along the top of the north wall. There are tall arched window openings in the east and west facades. The doors and windows are wood-framed. A stepped gable at the south end of the east and west facades conceals a rooftop water tank. The principal entrance is at the west end of the north facade, and is set between carved stone columns. There are wood and metal stairs and loading docks at the east elevation. A one-story brick addition projects from the south end of the east elevation, and reportedly houses oil tanks. The building has a sloped roof that is presently covered with an inverted membrane system, and a tall brick chimney stack.

The interior of the Power House is organized into two principal rooms at the first, main floor level. The north room has a red and white tile floor, white glazed brick walls, and terra cotta trim. In the north room, a mezzanine level extends along the center wall and is accessed by a metal stairway with an ornamental railing. There is a glass and metal skylight with two access walkways along the length of the ceiling. In the northwest corner of the north room is a wood and glass enclosed office. The south room is similar in configuration to the north room, but has unglazed brick walls and a concrete floor. Monitor skylights are located along the top of the center wall that divided the two main rooms. The structure of the building is masonry bearing walls with steel roof trusses.

The Power House originally provided power and heat, and generated electricity to operate conveyor belts, lighting, the pneumatic tube system, refrigeration plant, water pumps, and all other power needed by the Mail Order Plant. The mechanical equipment was designed by Martin C. Schwab of Adams and Schwab, consulting engineers, of Baltimore.

The building originally housed four direct connected generators with a capacity of 4,000 horsepower, and a 2,000 horsepower steam turbine with a generator. Fuel and ashes were handled mechanically. Underground tunnels carried pipes and wires from Power House to

all principal buildings. The tunnels provided a route for piping, pneumatic tubes, wiring, and tramways by which refuse could be taken back to the Power House and consumed by boilers.

Overall, the interior is unaltered except for the addition of modern machinery. The boilers are located in the basement. The main floor houses equipment to power the pneumatic tubing and elevators, pumps for water circulation and elevator operation. Two diesel generators for emergency power were added around 1970. Other new equipment includes air conditioning units and updated air compressors. A gas pump operates the sprinkler systems in the Merchandise Building, Wall Paper Mill, Printing and Advertising Building, and the basement of the Allstate Building. (The Administration Building has heat sensors.)

Paint Factory (1905-1906) and Wall Paper Mill (1912)

The Paint Factory is located at 3350 West Fillmore Street. The Wall Paper Mill has two addresses: 1012 South Spaulding Avenue, and 3340 West Fillmore Street. The Paint Factory and Wall Paper Mill are located on a site bounded by the Baltimore and Ohio railroad tracks on the north, Fillmore Street on the south, Spaulding Avenue on the east, and Homan Avenue on the west. The Paint Factory is 124 feet (38 meters) by 60 feet (18 meters) in plan. The Wall Paper Mill is 127 feet (39 meters) by 460 feet (140 meters) in plan. The two buildings are connected, and the principal entrances are in the south facade.

The Paint Factory was constructed as a two-story building in 1905-1906. In 1912, the five-story Wall Paper Mill was built adjacent to the paint factory. In 1919, two additional floors were added to the Paint Factory, and the adjacent New Paint Factory, consisting of a basement and five floors, was constructed. In the same year, a five-story addition to the Wall Paper Mill was completed.

The Paint Factory is four stories in height above a raised basement, and abuts the north side of the west elevation of the Wall Paper Mill. The facade is red brick with simple ornament including shallow brick arches over the windows, terra cotta copings, and metal stars at the ends of tension rods. The main entrance is at the north end of the west wall. At the west end of the north side of the Paint Factory, a metal-enclosed walkway extends across Homan Avenue to the Merchandise Building at the third floor level.

The Wall Paper Mill is five stories in height. This building is constructed of red brick with a stone base, and terra cotta trim. The windows are wood, double-hung units. Original scuppers with hinged metal covers are in place below many of the windows. There are five, rolling door vehicular entrances and a pedestrian entrance near the west end of the south elevation.

The utilitarian spaces within the Paint Factory retain their original timber construction, wood ceilings, wood floors, brick exterior walls, and metal sliding fire doors. The Wall Paper Mill retain original finishes including concrete columns and floors. The lobbies and offices have been renovated.

The Paint Factory is constructed with timber framing, and the Wall Paper Mill is constructed with concrete framing. Both buildings have steam radiator heat and air conditioning, and sprinkler systems. The roofs of both buildings are covered with ballasted inverted membrane systems.

The Paint Factory was constructed for manufacture of Sears, Roebuck and Company paint products to be sold by mail order, and later by retail stores. By 1918, more than one million gallons of paint were mixed each year. The entire paint manufacturing process was performed at the plant for Seroco brand ready-mixed paint: oils and pigments were mixed, components ground, the paint mixed by agitators, and packaged for sale.

The Wall Paper Mill was constructed for manufacture of Sears brands of paper products. By the 1920s, 35,000,000 rolls of paper were produced each year. Sears, Roebuck and Company controlled its source of paper supply, and used 7,000 tons of paper per year in the manufacture of ready-trimmed wallpaper. The in-house staff included artists and production personnel. Facilities included color mixing tanks, printing machines, and drying racks. The Paint Factory employed chemists to perform testing, as well as workers to run the mixing, stirring, and grinding machines located on different floors of the factory. This facility manufactured more than 1,250,000 gallons of ready-mixed paints each year in the 1920s.

After these buildings were no longer used for paint and wallpaper production, they were used as an office facility. The building was known as the Spaulding Building, and after 1961 was called the Data Processing Center.

Carpenter Shop (1907)

The Carpenter Shop was located at the northwest corner of Central Park Avenue and Arthington Street. This was a two-story building with a cement floor and wood frame. In this building were provided carpentry and related support services for the Mail Order Plant. A lumber yard and shed were located directly north of the Carpenter Shop. The Carpenter Shop was demolished after 1969.

Old Garage (1907)

The Old Garage was located on the south side of Fillmore Street, between Central Park Avenue and Independence Boulevard. This was a one-story structure with brick walls, concrete floors, and a wood truss roof structure. The Old Garage was demolished circa 1982.

Garden and Pergola (1907)

The garden opposite the Administration Building was created circa 1907. The garden occupies the south half of the block bounded by Polk Street on the north, Arthington Street on the south, Spaulding Avenue on the east, and Homan Avenue on the west. The north half of the block is occupied by a parking lot. The garden faces the north facade of the Administration Building.

The central feature of the garden is the pergola, which is located at the center along the north edge of the garden and approached by concrete walks. The pergola is approximately 106 feet (32 meters) by 22 feet (seven meters) in plan. The sunken garden in front of the pergola originally featured a large pool with fountains. The pool has been filled in to grade. The garden features various ground plantings.

The pergola is constructed of concrete and wood. Concrete steps at each end lead to a concrete walk along the length of the structure. There are raised planters with evergreens

along the north and south sides of the pergola. At each end of the pergola is a pedimented portico of concrete; overhanging wood beams extend between the porticos and cover the center walkway. The beams are supported on smooth Doric columns. The concrete porticos are covered with cementitious stucco that is painted white. Each portico has a red tile gabled roof. The roof ends have dentilated pediments above an entablature that is supported on fluted Doric columns.

The garden as originally realized included various plantings and a "lake" containing goldfish and three fountains. A series of promotional stereopticon slides created by the firm circa 1908 noted that the pergola and garden were planned "as a veritable bower," and explained that the purpose of the garden was "so that our employes (*sic*) may be attracted out of doors during the noon recess, because a change of environment and attractive surroundings send them back to work again greatly refreshed and forgetful of the little annoyances of the morning."⁶⁶ Sears promotional literature commented:

Indeed our plant is located in an ideal spot where the air is pure, and there is plenty of sunshine; since we have beautified our grounds...the surroundings of those who work for us are unusually attractive. We believe these surroundings inspire our workers to better things and make for contentment and happiness.⁶⁷

In the 1910s, an employee wrote of the benefits this garden provided to workers at the Mail Order Plant:

If anything was needed to educate the employes to the fact that Sears, Roebuck and Company have their interest at heart, the flower gardens that are situated in front of the Administration Building would successfully do it. They are an addition to the plant and a valuable asset in beautifying the surroundings....It would be difficult to find any one of the employes (*sic*) of Sears, Roebuck and Company to whom our gardens do not convey a definite and more or less accurate impression of the real beauty of flowers. The gardens are available to all of us and a little time spent in them every day is well worth the while. You cannot help but realize that the spirit of progress is shown in our flower gardens as well as in the departments of this great institution.⁶⁸

With minor changes to the fountains, paving, and plantings, the Garden has been maintained in its original configuration. The Pergola is also intact.

Men's and Women's Field Houses (1908)

The Men's Field House was located at the northeast corner of Arthington Street and St. Louis Avenue, facing west. The block containing the Men's Field House was given over to

⁶⁶ Stereopticon slide, Sears, Roebuck and Company archives, circa 1908.

⁶⁷ "The Administration Building from the Pergola," stereopticon slide, Sears, Roebuck and Company archives, circa 1908.

⁶⁸ Letter from G.E. Sanborn, Department 147, to Mr. I.S. Rosenfels, July 15, 1918.

an athletic field with a running track, an indoor baseball practice area, and a baseball diamond at the northwest corner of Arthington Street and Homan Avenue. The Woman's Field House was located on the north side of Arthington Street, between St. Louis and Central Park Avenues. This block also originally contained tennis courts. Both of these structures were completed in 1908, and were one story in height. The Women's Field House was demolished prior to 1929. The Men's Field House was demolished some time after 1929 and prior to 1961.

YMCA Building (1910)

The YMCA Building is located at 3210 West Arthington Street, on a site bounded by Polk Street on the north, Arthington Street on the south, Kedzie Avenue on the east, and a parking garage on the west. The YMCA Building is five stories in height and measures approximately 201 feet (61 meters) by 209 feet (64 meters) in plan. It is E-shaped in plan. The front facade of the building faces south; the east facade is a secondary street facade.

The YMCA Building is constructed of brick with ornamental brick gables and terra cotta trim including belt courses, window surrounds, and sills. There is a decorative brick pattern inset with terra cotta tile above the first floor level. The building has glazed wood doors and wood-framed, double-hung windows. The main entrance near the center of the south elevation is flanked by polished granite columns with carved stone capitals.

Interior spaces that retain original features include the room at the south side of the second floor, which has a barrel vault ceiling with ornamental plaster, brick fireplace, and wood wainscoting, trim, and office partitions.

The YMCA was constructed by Sears, Roebuck and Company as a branch of the YMCA of Chicago, to provide recreational, social, and educational facilities for Sears workers. It offered a gymnasium, swimming pool, reading room, and 300 residential rooms. Some Sears employees lived at the YMCA.

1911-1930 Building Campaigns

As described in detail above with reference to specific buildings, the decade of the 1910s saw the expansion of the Merchandise Building and its Annexes, the Administration Building, and the Printing and Advertising Building. In 1912 the Grocery Building and Box Factory were constructed at the west end of Annex B. In the same year, the Wall Paper Mill was constructed adjacent to the Paint Factory. An addition to the Printing and Advertising Building was constructed in 1913.

Between 1913 and 1916, additions were made to the west end of the Merchandise Building Annex B. In 1914, additions were made to the Administration Building and to the Printing and Advertising Building. A further addition was made to the Administration Building in 1917. Additions to the Merchandise Building Annex A were completed in 1917, and to the Paint Factory and Wall Paper Mill in 1919. These additions are described above, together with original construction and other improvements to these buildings.

In addition to expansion of the original Mail Order Plant buildings, several new structures were built at the site in this decade, as described below.

Apartment Building (pre-1910; in use by Sears circa 1911)

An apartment building for the Mail Order Plant's fire chief and chief of police was located directly east of the Fire Station, east of Homan Avenue on Polk Street. Historic photographs suggest that this was a two-story apartment building above a raised basement, constructed with a stone-clad street facade and brick side walls. This building was constructed after 1896 but prior to 1910, and was probably acquired by Sears, Roebuck and Company to house its personnel rather than being built for Sears. This building has been demolished.

Fire Station and Engine House (circa 1911)

The Fire Station was located at the southeast corner of Homan Avenue and Polk Street. This was a two-story building of brick construction. A one-story brick Engine House was also constructed directly south of the Fire Station. Both of these buildings were completed circa 1911. The on-site Fire Department responded to a completely automatic electric signal system. In addition to its own fire truck, the Mail Order Plant had its own police service and traffic control service. The Fire Station and Engine House have been demolished.

Central Park Building (1912)

In 1912, the five-story Central Park Building was constructed at the northwest corner of Central Park Avenue and Fillmore Street. This was a fireproof masonry building with concrete floors and brick curtain walls. By the 1920s, this building housed business machine repair facilities on the first floor, a sign shop on the second floor, and a window shade factory on the third floor. From 1961, it was known as the General Services Building, at which time it was used for maintenance of customer motors for boats and lawnmowers. This building was demolished in December, 1987.

Property Building (1912)

The five-story Property Building was also built in 1912. It was of fireproof construction, with brick walls and concrete structural elements. Located at the southwest corner of Central Park Avenue and Arthington Street, this building provided offices and warehouse space. From 1961, it was known as the Construction and Display Building. It was demolished in December, 1993.

Standard Brands Building (1913)

The Standard Brands Building, a two-story masonry building constructed in 1913, was located on the north side of Fillmore Street, east of Independence Boulevard. The original function of this building was to house baking powder production. In recent years, this building housed office supplies for Sears, Roebuck and Company's corporate and retail store offices. From 1961, it was known as the Division of Supplies Building. It was demolished circa 1980.

Fillmore Street Garage (1917)

In 1917, the Fillmore Street Garage, a one-story structure, was built on the south side of Fillmore Street, between Central Park Avenue and Independence Boulevard. The garage

was constructed for Sears company vehicles, including automobiles, trucks, and semi-trailers. The garage was demolished circa 1980.

Manufacturing Building No. 1 (pre-1918)

By 1918, Manufacturing Building No. 1 had been constructed west of the Grocery Building. This building housed facilities for the manufacture of trunks and tents carried by Sears, Roebuck and Company. Wood was dried in kilns, tongue grooved and glued, and the completed trunks painted and varnished. In addition to trunks, products fabricated at Manufacturing Building No. 1 included Fulton Brand 19-inch full weight duck tents, covers, tarpaulins, and awnings. Cotton duck fabric was purchased from mills for this process. By the 1920s, more than 50,000 trunks and 10,000 tents were produced annually. A portion of the facility was also used for production of shipping boxes for the Mail Order Plant. This building was demolished, probably during the 1960s prior to construction of the Catalogues Operation Building.

Green House (pre-1919)

Other additions to the site by 1919 included a Green House for plantings. The location of this structure is not documented; it was probably sited near the Garden.

Metal Cabinet Works (late 1920s)

By the late 1920s, a Metal Cabinet Works had been constructed at the southwest corner of Fillmore Street and Central Park Avenue. This was a tall, one-story structure with brick walls, concrete floors, and a wood truss roof structure lighted by monitor skylights. This building was originally used for fabrication of metal cabinets. It was known as the Catalogue Distribution Building by the 1960s, at which time it was used for processing of catalogues and advertising for mailings. The building was later used as a Sign Shop. It has been demolished.

Garage (pre-1929)

By 1929, a Garage structure had been constructed directly west of the Old Garage, on the south side of Fillmore Street, east of Independence Boulevard. This was a one-story structure with concrete floors, brick walls, and a wood truss roof. It also housed a Fur Cleaning department. This building was known as the Supplies Annex Building by the early 1960s, and was later used for tire storage. It has been demolished.

Storage Building (pre-1929)

By 1929, a one-story Storage Building had been constructed directly east of the Carpenter Shop. This was a masonry structure with a bowstring truss roof structure. The Storage Building was demolished prior to 1964.

Service Station and Auto Parts Building (pre-1929)

Also by 1929, a Service Station including a car wash was constructed on the north side of Arthington Street, between Homan Avenue and St. Louis Avenue. An Auto Parts building was located east of the Service Station. Both buildings have been demolished.

Warehouse (pre-1929)

A timber frame warehouse was constructed directly east of the Standard Brands Building by 1929.

Garden Shop (circa 1930)

A Garden Shop was located at the northwest corner of Arthington Street and Homan Avenue by circa 1930. This has also been demolished.

During the first several decades of this century, as the Mail Order Plant was constructed and expanded, significant residential development occurred in the area surrounding the plant. By the late 1920s, the entire area was developed with either residential, light industrial, or Sears Mail Order Plant occupancies. Most of the residential buildings were two and three story masonry structures, with some frame dwellings interspersed. In addition to the Sears properties described above, various manufacturing properties were located in the area, mostly along Fillmore Street. These included a wooden box factory, refrigerator parts factory, sheet metal shop, and the Cinch Manufacturing Corporation.⁶⁹ A City Water Pumping Station was located at the northeast corner of Fillmore Street and Central Park Avenue.

1949: The Allstate Building

The Allstate Building is located at 3245 West Arthington Street, on a site bounded by Arthington Street on the north, a parking lot on the south and east, and Spaulding Avenue on the west. The Allstate Building is ten stories in height above a basement and measures approximately 160 feet (49 meters) by 218 feet (66 meters) in plan. It is rectangular in plan. The front facade of the building faces north.

The facades of the Allstate Building are composed of horizontal bands of metal-framed, double-hung ribbon windows alternated with horizontal bands of red brick, with dark brown at the first floor. The main entrance to the building is an aluminum and glass curtain wall system at the center of the north elevation. A metal-enclosed walkway extends from the Allstate Building to the parking structure directly to the north.

The building retains several original interior spaces, including the main lobby which has terrazzo floors and stairs, and green marble and plaster walls. The elevator lobbies and corridors also retain original terrazzo floors, wood wainscot, wood doors, and plaster ceilings. Most offices also retain some of their original finishes.

The structural system of the building is a concrete frame. Mechanical systems include steam radiator heat and air conditioning.

The Allstate Building was constructed to house the offices of Allstate, Sears, Roebuck and Company's insurance company. Allstate, initiated as Sears' brand of tires in the late 1920s,

⁶⁹ Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, vicinity of Arthington Street and Homan Avenue, 1929. The manufacturing facilities listed in the preceding sentence were not identified on the Sanborn map as part of the Sears, Roebuck and Company complex, although the Mail Order Plant did include various manufacturing facilities by this date.

also offered automobile supplies and accessories. By 1931, Allstate services included automobile insurance, later supplemented by a companion firm, Allstate Fire Insurance. The Allstate Building was later used for other Sears offices, and after 1961 was known as the Merchandise Headquarters Building.

Later Construction at the Mail Order Plant

By the 1960s, demolition of some of the older structures at the complex had occurred, as noted above. The physical fabric of the residential area surrounding the Mail Order Plant had also begun to deteriorate, with demolitions occurring over the next few decades.

The major developments at the Sears complex during the 1960s involved constructed of new parking lots were being created around the buildings of the plants. A new east entrance was constructed for Administration Building, providing a two-level entrance with stairs to the basement and first floor. An adjacent wall between the Administration Building and the Printing and Advertising Building (then called the Merchandise Development Laboratory Building) was constructed, with a three-level lift for truck goods transfer.⁷⁰

Parking Garages

On September 25, 1964, a new, three-level parking garage opened at Polk and Homan Streets. The brick and concrete structure provided 1,350 spaces over 466,122 square feet of floor space. It was designed by Dunlap and Esgar, Inc., architects, of Chicago, the successor firm to Nimmons, Carr & Wright and Nimmons and Fellows, who had designed the Mail Order Plant. Contractors for the garage were the Miller-Davis Company of Melrose Park.⁷¹ After 1964 but prior to 1969, the East Parking Deck was constructed across Arthington Avenue from the Allstate Building.

Tower Automotive Center

On April 2, 1964, the Tower Store Automotive Center opened at 3452 Polk Street. The 50,000 square foot center included 12 gas islands, 235 parking spaces, and a two-story brick building. The second floor was used for storage. The center was designed by John Stokes Redden, Architect, and constructed by B-W Construction Co. of Chicago.⁷²

Catalogue Operations Building

The Catalogue Operations Building was constructed in 1964 on the lot bounded by Central Park Avenue, Lawndale Avenue, Arthington Street, and the railroad tracks. This building was immediately adjacent to the Property Services Building to the north. It was constructed with a steel frame and metal cladding. The Catalogue Operations Building, also known as

⁷⁰ "Progress Report on the Modernization and Improvement Program," Sears, Roebuck and Company, 1962.

⁷¹ Press release, "Sears Parking Garage to Open," by John D. Austin, Public Relations, Sears Roebuck and Company, 1964.

⁷² *Ibid.*

Building 188, was the site of shipping operations from the 1960s until closing of the plant in 1987. It was connected by metal-clad pedestrian bridges to the west ends of Annex A and the Grocery Building. The Catalogue Operations Building was demolished in December, 1993.

Surface Parking Lots

By the late 1960s, extensive surface parking for employees and customers had been added in lots at the northwest corner of Central Park and Arthington; in the block bounded by Central Park, Lawndale, Arthington, and the railroad tracks; south of the railroad tracks between Central Park and Independence; in the block bounded by Central Park, St. Louis, Arthington, and Polk; in the block bounded by St. Louis, Homan, Arthington, and Polk; behind the Allstate Building in the lot bounded by Spaulding, Kedzie, Arthington, and the railroad tracks; and in lots at the northeast, southeast, and southwest corners of Spaulding and Fillmore Streets. With the exception of the Garden, most of the open space between buildings and in adjacent empty lots within the complex was taken up by surface parking.

Sources of Information

Archival Drawings

Archival copies of the following drawings are included in this HABS documentation. An annotated list of the drawings is included with that portion of the HABS documentation.

Site Plans

Sears, Roebuck and Co., Approximately 1/8 inch to 12 feet, Drawn by Sears Department 198, 4 November 1937.

Plot of Sears Complex - Homan-Arthington Area, One inch to 100 feet, Prepared by Sears Departments 730 and 824, 26 October 1960.

Architectural Drawings

First Floor Plan, 1/16 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 16 February 1905.

Tower Floor Plans, 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, February 1905.

North Elevation, 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, February 1905 (Date obscured).

South Elevation, 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, February 1905 (Date obscured).

East Elevation, 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, February 1905 (Date obscured).

West Elevation, 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, February 1905 (Date obscured).

Transverse and Longitudinal Sections, 1/16 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 14 February 1905.

Tower Plans and Details, 1/2 inch to one foot or as noted, Nimmons and Fellows, 15 March 1905.

Tower Plans and Details, 1/2 inch to one foot or as noted, Nimmons and Fellows; E. C. and R. M. Shankland (Civil Engineers), 15 March 1905.

Detail Elevations and Sections, 1/2 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, February 1905.

First Floor Plan - Annex "A" and Annex "B", 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

North Elevation - Annex "A", 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

South Elevation - Annex "A", 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

North Elevation - Annex "B", 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

West Elevation - Annex "A" and Annex "B", 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

Transverse Section - Annex "A" and Annex "B", 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

Detail Elevations - Annex "A" and Annex "B", 1/2 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

Fourth Floor Plan (Annex "A," bays J and K, for floors four through nine), 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 25 January 1910.

Fourth Floor Plan (Annex "B," bays P and Q, for floors four through nine), 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 25 January 1910.

South Elevation (Annex "A," bays P and Q, for floors four through nine), 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 25 January 1910.

West Elevation and Transverse Section (Annex "A," bays P and Q, for floors four through nine), 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 25 January 1910.

Basement Floor Plan, 1/8 inch to one foot, George C. Nimmons (?), date obscured (1912).

North Elevation (Annex "A," bays L, M, N, and O, for floors four through nine), 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 17 May 1916.

South Elevation (Annex "A," bays L, M, N, and O, for floors four through nine), 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 17 May 1916.

West Elevation (Annex "A," bays L, M, N, and O, for floors four through nine), 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 17 May 1916.

Schematic Floor Plan, 1/64 inch to one foot, Drawn by Sears Department 131, 25 June 1917.

Fourth Floor Plan (Two sheets), 1/16 inch to one foot, Larsen-Wulff Architects, Undated.

Conveyor and Pneumatic Tube Systems

Section through Merchandise Building Looking East Showing System of Conveyors in Shipping Department, 1/4 inch to one foot, Adams and Schwab, 26 April 1905.

Conveyors - Merchandise Building, 1/16 inch to one foot, Adams and Schwab, Revised 10 May 1905.

Details of Spiral Conveyors in Merchandise Building, 1/8 inch and 1/4 inch to one foot, Adams and Schwab, 13 May 1905.

Arrangement of Shipping Room Belt Conveyors in Merchandise Building for Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1/8 inch to one foot, Martin C. Schwab, Undated (probably before 1913).

General Layout of All Mdse Dept. Conveyors, 1/16 inch to one foot, Drawn by Sears Department 213 (engineer unknown), 6 October 1916.

General Layout of Pneumatic Tubes - Sheets 1, 2, 3, and 9, One inch to 60 feet, Drawn by Sears Department 224 (engineer unknown), Undated (probably around 1920).

Rearrangement of Receiving Racks, Conveyors, Etc., 3/16 inch to one foot, Engineer Unknown, Revised 2 November 1937.

2nd Floor Section "B", 1/4 inch to one foot, Swain and Meyers, Inc., 24 June 1963

Field Record Drawings

Copies of the following drawings are included in the field record with this HABS documentation. An annotated list of the drawings is included with the field record.

Site Plan Drawings

Plat of Survey, One inch to twenty feet, Gustav H. Carlson (surveyor), 30 January 1905.

Architectural Drawings

North Elevation, 1/16 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, February 1905 (Date obscured).

Wall Section Detail, scale as noted, Nimmons and Fellows; E.C. and R.M. Shankland (Civil Engineers), 16 February 1905.

Basement Floor Plan - Annex "A" and Annex "B", 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

Second Floor Plan - Annex "A" and Annex "B", 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

Third Floor Plan - Annex "A" and Annex "B", 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

Roof Plan - Annex "A" and Annex "B", 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

South Elevation - Annex "B", 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

Details of Platforms, 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 1905 (Exact date obscured).

Ninth Floor Plan (Annex "A," bays J and K, for floors four through nine), 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 25 January 1910.

Roof Plan (Annex "A," bays J and K, for floors four through nine), 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 25 January 1910.

Detail Elevation (Annexes "A" and "B," for floors four through nine), 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 25 January 1910.

Roof Plan (Annex "A," bays L, M, N, and O, for floors four through nine), 1/8 inch to one foot, Nimmons and Fellows, 17 May 1916.

Layout of Merchandise Building, 1/64 inch to one foot, Drawn Sears Department 131, 25 June 1917.

Floor Plan - 14th Floor Tower, 3/8 inch to one foot, Drawn by Sears Department 224, 19 March 1923.

Alterations to Merchandise Building for Retail Store, 1/16 inch to one foot, George C. Nimmons and Company, Revised 22 December 1924.

Floor Plan of First Floor Merchandise, 1/16 inch to one foot, Drawn by Sears Department 224, 26 December 1924.

Entrance Remodeling - Plans and Details, scale as noted, John Stokes Redden, 14 April 1961.

Conveyor and Pneumatic Tube Systems

Pneumatic Tube Station, Three inches to one foot, Adams and Schwab, Revised 28 December 1905.

General Arrangement of Empty Box Conveyor for Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1/16 inch to one foot, Martin C. Schwab, Revised 27 March 1913.

Arrangement Showing Billing and Empty Basket Return Belts in Shipping Room for Sears, Roebuck and Co., 1/8 inch to one foot, Martin C. Schwab, Revised 12 December 1914.

Spiral Chute to be Installed in N.W. Corner Section L in the Merchandise Building, 1/4 inch to one foot, Martin C. Schwab, 28 May 1919.

Extension to Present Spiral Gravity Conveyor in Section "H" of the Merchandise Building, 1/4 inch to one foot, Martin C. Schwab, 9 July 1919.

General Layout of Pneumatic Tubes - Sheets 4 through 8, and 10 through 14, One inch to 60 feet, Drawn by Sears Department 224 (engineer unknown), Undated (probably around 1920).

Conveyor Plan for Post Office in Merchandise Building, 1/8 inch to one foot, Martin C. Schwab, 4 June 1920.

Space Occupied by Post Office at Sears-Roebuck Mail Order House, 1/8 inch to one foot, Drawn by the United States Post Office, October 1944.

Department 155 Layout - Second Floor Truck Court, 1/8 inch to one foot, Drawn by Sears Department 131M (Engineer Unknown), Revised 20 May 1965.

Early Views

Overall view of Administration Building and Merchandise Building, view to southwest, across garden. Photograph circa 1908, original print in Archives, Public Affairs Department, Sears Merchandise Group, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Photographer unknown.

Overall view of Printing and Advertising Building, Administration Building, and Merchandise Building, view to west-southwest. Photograph circa 1908, original print in Archives, Public Affairs Department, Sears Merchandise Group, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Photographer unknown.

Overall view of Merchandise Building, Power House, and Administration Building, view to northwest. Photograph circa 1908, original print in Archives, Public Affairs Department, Sears Merchandise Group, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Photographer unknown.

Overall view of Mail Order Plant, view to south. Rendering dated February 15, 1913, original rendering in Archives, Public Affairs Department, Sears Merchandise Group, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Artist unknown.

Overall view of Printing and Advertising Building, Administration Building, and Merchandise Building, view to southeast. Photograph circa 1920s, original print in Archives, Public Affairs Department, Sears Merchandise Group, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Photographer unknown.

View of garden and pergola, view to northeast from Administration Building roof. Photograph circa 1940s, original print in Archives, Public Affairs Department, Sears Merchandise Group, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Photographer unknown.

Aerial view of Mail Order Plant and surrounding neighborhood, view to southeast. Photograph circa 1950, original print in Archives, Public Affairs Department, Sears Merchandise Group, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Photographer unknown.

Aerial view of Mail Order Plant and surrounding neighborhood, view to west. Photograph circa 1950, original print in Archives, Public Affairs Department, Sears Merchandise Group, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Photographer unknown.

Overall view of Administration Building and Merchandise Building, view to southwest. Photograph circa 1964, original print in Archives, Public Affairs Department, Sears Merchandise Group, Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Photographer unknown.

Interviews

Interviews of Mr. Thomas Dorgan, Building Manager, Charles H. Shaw Company, at Sears, Roebuck and Company Mail Order Plant, Administration Building, by Jeffrey P. Koerber, Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., Chicago, Illinois, February-March, 1994.

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Sears, Roebuck and Company Archives. Hoffman Estates, Illinois. Press Release: "Sears Parking Garage to Open." 1964.

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