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# Mail-Order Homes: Sears Homes and Other Kit Houses (Shire USA)

*Rebecca Hunter*

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At the turn of the last century, the American middle class was expanding rapidly as homesteaders moved west and as trains took travellers across the country, where they established themselves in the depot towns that erupted along train lines. With that growth came the demand for new homes, and from that demand grew a new industry: mail-order homes. Sold by such makers as Sears, Roebuck & Co., Aladdin, and Montgomery Wards, these kit homes were shipped by train, arriving in two boxcars, which then were off-loaded by the purchasers, usually with a team of horse and wagon. In the boxcars was absolutely everything needed to assemble a house, whether it be a vacation cottage, modest bungalow, or two-and-a-half storey home. Literally tens of thousands of these affordable homes were sold in the early 1900s, with most built between 1910-40. In Mail-Order Homes, historical architectural researcher Rebecca Hunter brings to life the history of these charming homes, many of which still stand in communities across the country. From the manufacturers of mail-order homes to the customers who bought and built them, and from the styles and designs to the boom and bust of the industry, Hunter explains the history of these forgotten homes. Filled with illustrations from mail-order home catalogs and contemporary photos, this book tells the story of a bygone era of residential architecture.

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