

FINAL LANDMARK DESIGNATION REPORT



Sears, Roebuck and Co. District

PRIMARILY THE 800- TO 900-BLOCKS OF S. HOMAN AVE., THE 3300- TO 3400-BLOCKS OF W. ARHTINGTON ST., AND THE 800- TO 900-BLOCK OF S. SPAULDING AVE.

Final Landmark Recommendation adopted by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks, December 4, 2014



CITY OF CHICAGO
Rahm Emanuel, Mayor

Department of Planning and Development
Andrew J. Mooney, Commissioner

The Commission on Chicago Landmarks, whose nine members are appointed by the Mayor and City Council, was established in 1968 by city ordinance. The Commission is responsible for recommending to the City Council which individual buildings, sites, objects, or districts should be designated as Chicago Landmarks, which protects them by law.

The landmark designation process begins with a staff study and a preliminary summary of information related to the potential designation criteria. The next step is a preliminary vote by the landmarks commission as to whether the proposed landmark is worthy of consideration. This vote not only initiates the formal designation process, but it places the review of city permits for the property under the jurisdiction of the Commission until a final landmark recommendation is acted on by the City Council.

This Landmark Designation Report is subject to possible revision and amendment during the designation process. Only language contained within a designation ordinance adopted by the City Council should be regarded as final.

SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO. DISTRICT

ADMINISTRATION BUILDING

3333 WEST ARTHINGTON ST.

BUILT: 1905 (ORIGINAL TWO-STORY BUILDING)
1914 (TOP THREE STORIES)
ARCHITECTS: NIMMONS AND FELLOWS (1905)
GEORGE C. NIMMONS AND CO. (1914)

PRINTING/MERCHANDISE DEVELOPMENT AND LABORATORY (MDL) BUILDING

3301 W. ARTHINGTON ST.

BUILT: 1905 (4-STORY BUILDING)
1909-1912 (4-STORY REAR ANNEX)
1916 (TWO-STORY ROOFTOP ADDITION TO 1905 BUILDING)
ARCHITECTS: NIMMONS AND FELLOWS (1905)
GEORGE C. NIMMONS AND CO. (1909-1912; 1916)

REMAINING TOWER OF THE MERCHANDISE BUILDING

900 S. HOMAN AVE.

BUILT: 1906
ARCHITECT: NIMMONS AND FELLOWS

POWER HOUSE

931 S. HOMAN AVE.

BUILT: 1906
ARCHITECT: NIMMONS AND FELLOWS

PARK AND PERGOLA

NORTH SIDE OF W. ARTHINGTON ST. BETWEEN S. HOMAN AVE. AND S. SPAULDING AVE.

BUILT: 1907
ARCHITECT: NIMMONS AND FELLOWS

Located on the far West Side of Chicago in the North Lawndale community area, the Sears, Roebuck and Co. District is comprised of four buildings and a park with pergola constructed from 1905 to 1907 by the Sears, Roebuck and Co. for its long-time headquarters campus. This ensemble exemplifies the historic importance of Sears as one of Chicago's most important companies and America's leading retailer for much of the twentieth century.

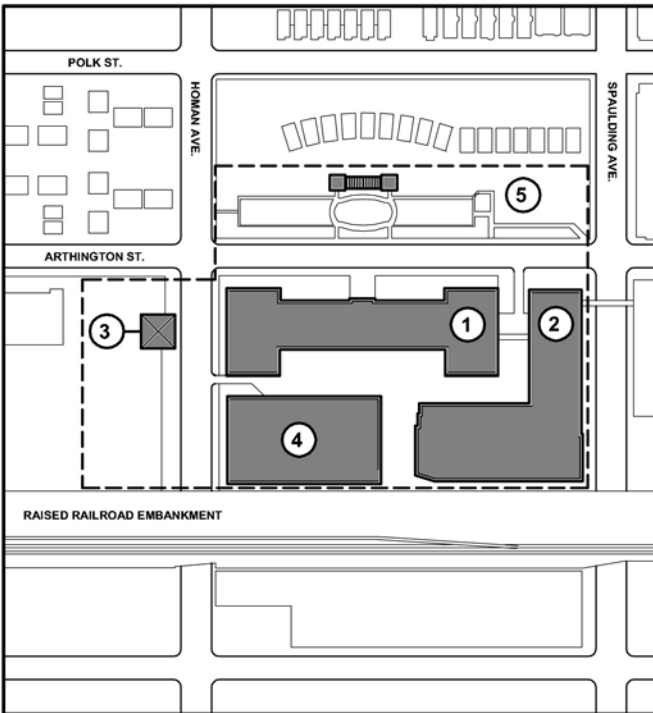
Sears, Roebuck and Co. grew rapidly from its founding in 1894 to become the nation's largest purveyor of goods to small-town and rural America. Chicago's excellent transportation infrastructure and manufacturing base made the city an ideal location for mail-order merchants, of which Sears was the largest. In the 1920s the company augmented its catalog business with retail stores to cater to an increasingly mobile and urban population. By the 1960s, Sears was the largest retailer in the world and was the first to achieve \$1 billion in monthly sales.

The district is closely associated with the careers of three important Sears, Roebuck and Co. executives who are regarded as important figures in the history of American business. Richard W. Sears, the company's founder and first president, originated the Sears mail-order catalog, an iconic symbol of American merchandising, and through the catalog, Sears cemented the company's long-standing relationship with rural and small-town customers. Julius Rosenwald, who succeeded Sears as company president, was the driving force behind the construction of the Sears headquarters campus in North Lawndale. Rosenwald managed the company's expansion during the early 20th century, while becoming a leading philanthropist, supporting the University of Chicago, Adler Planetarium and a variety of African-American causes throughout the United States. Robert Wood, Sears' third president, guided the company's embrace of "bricks-and-mortar" retail stores, which allowed Sears to maintain its leading position as a national merchant in the post-World War II era.

In addition to its historic significance, the Sears, Roebuck and Co. District is a fine ensemble of historic commercial and industrial architecture, as well as landscape design. Though the buildings each served different purposes, they were designed to be visually cohesive and to be a statement of Sears' outstanding role in American business. The buildings and pergola of the district were designed by the nationally-significant architectural firm of Nimmons and Fellows, with later additions to the Administration and MDL buildings being the work of George C. Nimmons. Nimmons was an early twentieth-century expert in industrial architectural design and a master in combining the Chicago School principle of a clearly- and rationally-expressed structure with Classical- and Prairie-style ornament.

The historic and architectural significance of the Sears, Roebuck and Co. headquarters and mail order plant was first recognized in 1978 when the complex was designated by the federal government as a National Historic Landmark (NHL), one of only 2500 historic places in the US which "possess exceptional value or quality in illustrating or interpreting the heritage of the United States." Despite this recognition, the catalog operation of Sears was becoming unprofitable. Operations at the mail order plant were scaled back and they were completely halted in 1987. In 1993 the unprofitable catalog operation and underperforming stores were closed.

Due to the size of the Sears Campus and the impact its closing would have on the City and neighborhood, the Sears corporation recruited a development entity in 1993 to plan a reuse for the vacant buildings and redevelop the campus for the neighborhood. The complex would be renamed Homan Square. As part of this agreement, the Merchandise Building was determined to be unable to be reused and it was demolished, with the exception of the tower. The ongoing redevelopment of Homan Square is discussed on page 26. Before demolition, the complex was extensively documented by the Historic American Building Survey (HABS), a National Park Service program. In 2002, the Sears Administration Building was individually designated as a Chicago Landmark.



- Sears, Roebuck and Co. District**
- ① **Administration Building**
- ② **Printing/Merchandise Development and Laboratory (MDL) Building**
- ③ **Merchandise Building Tower**
- ④ **Power House**
- ⑤ **Park and Pergola**

The Sears, Roebuck and Co. District is located on the Far West Side of Chicago in the North Lawndale community area. The District consists of four buildings and a park with pergola situated on eight acres of land centered around the intersection of S. Homan Avenue and W. Arthington Street. The aerial photo (top) shows the arrangement of the historic structures and park on the site.

This map is meant for illustrative purposes only. The final district boundary and description would be defined in a Chicago landmark designation ordinance passed by City Council.

THE HISTORY OF SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO.

Throughout much of the twentieth century, Sears, Roebuck and Co. was a national leader in the merchandising industry, first as a premiere mail-order company, then later adding retail stores. In the early-20th century, Sears' products transformed the material cultural of households, farms and workshops in rural areas and small towns across the country through the wide-spread American embrace of the Sears mail-order catalog. As America became more urban and mobile in the 1920s, Sears' expanded its mail-order business with a nationwide chain of retail stores that helped it maintain its position as one of America's leading merchandise companies in the post-World War II era.

Sears' immense processing, manufacturing, printing, shipping and warehousing activities made a significant contribution to Chicago's economic development for much of the 20th century. The city was ideally located to bring rural consumers and urban manufacturers together through the catalogs which offered a glimpse of city life and direct access to products with no "middle man." In his book *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West (1991)*, environmental historian William Cronon described the Chicago mail-order business model:

Henceforth, it needn't really matter whether one lived in city or country, for the good life could be purchased by mail wherever one made one's home. The advent of the post office's rural free delivery in 1896 was an immediate consequence of the public demand that Ward and Sears had helped create, and it pointed the way to the roads, telephones, electrical networks, and chain stores that would transform the rural landscape of America in the twentieth century.

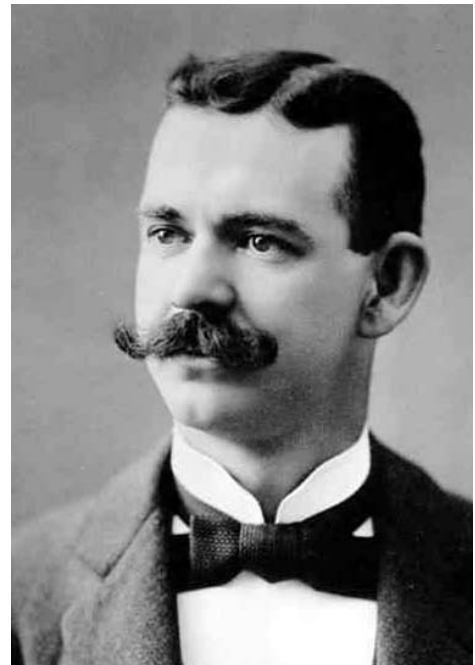
It would also, as Cronon points out, provide a conduit for transmitting the wealth of the rural areas back to the city. This transfer of wealth from country to city was not unwelcome to rural Americans as farm families benefitted from lower prices on mail-order goods compared to prices at local small-town retail prices. In the late-19th century, these households sold their crops for cash and bought goods from local stores where the price of retail goods was often 100 percent more than wholesale costs of the same products in cities where they were manufactured. Organizations of farmers such as "the Grange" protested inflated prices offered by local "middlemen." Mail-order companies such as Sears were able to offer goods at lower costs by elimination such middleman, by leveraging expanding rail networks to distribute goods and by taking advantage of the then-new free rural delivery offered by the post office (another service advocated by the Grange) to reach rural customers.

The company's establishment by Richard Sears and the creation of the Sears catalog

Though Sears, Roebuck & Co. achieved its most lasting importance as a Chicago company, it traces its origins to Minnesota. There in the small town of North Redwood, **Richard Warren Sears (1863-1914)** worked as a telegrapher and station agent for the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad. In addition to his employment with the railroad, Sears dabbled in selling goods to the townspeople of North Redwood. In 1886 he bought a shipment of wholesale Chicago-made watches and resold them at a modest profit. Watches at this time, particularly in rural America, were becoming more of a necessity than a luxury as daily life became more regulated by train schedules.



Richard Warren Sears (left) worked as a railway station agent for the Minneapolis and St. Louis Railroad at its depot in the small town of North Redwood, Minnesota (top). In 1886 a local jeweler refused a COD shipment of watches, and these were left at the depot. Sears bought the shipment instead and sold them at a modest profit. It would be Sears' first step in becoming a leading national merchant.



Alvah Curtis Roebuck (above) was a watchmaker hired by Richard Sears in 1887. Although he remained as a company executive only until 1895, his name lived as part of the company name.



The Sears Catalog was iconic in American society and made Sears, Roebuck and Co. a household name throughout America.

The cover of the 1898 Sears Catalog includes Richard Sears' promotional slogans such as "Cheapest Supply House on Earth," and claiming "Our trade reaches around the World." The cover's images depict the mail-order business model, with an industrial landscape on the left and a rural one on the right joined by a cornucopia of merchandise.

Before buildings its West Side headquarters, Sears rented and built several commercial buildings, barely keeping pace with its growth and hampering efficiency. In 1896 the company moved to a larger building (right) at the northeast corner of Desplaines and Fulton on Chicago's Near West Side. However, this facility soon proved inadequate, and in 1898 Sears commissioned architect John M. Van Osdel to construct a large addition to the building. The building still stands as a loft condominium.



Facing pages from the 1902 catalog above show the diverse range of merchandise on offer as well as Richard Sears' ability to write for a rural audience. The description of the Acme Organ on the left states that the price of a similar item at a store would be inflated by the profits of middlemen. The description of the steel windmill on the right urged the reader to ask their neighbors about their experience with similar Sears products. Though the catalog cost 50 cents, the description notes "one catalog among three, four or five families is quite sufficient."



With the success of his first watch sales, Sears ordered more and sold these through other station agents on the railroad. Within six months he made a substantial profit of \$5,000. The success of his watch business convinced Sears to leave the railroad and North Redwood for Minneapolis, where he established the R. W. Sears Watch Company. He marketed through newspaper advertisements and by sending direct mail flyers that revealed his talent for writing persuasive ad copy, a skill which later would help Sears when he published the first Sears mail-order catalog in 1893.

In 1887 Sears established a branch of his company in Chicago where he hired watchmaker Alvah C. Roebuck to assist him with repairs. Two years later, Sears sold the three-year old R.W. Sears Watch Co. for a handsome profit of \$72,000, and he moved to Iowa to take up banking. However Sears soon returned to Chicago and the watch and jewelry business with Roebuck. The contract for the sale of his original company prevented Sears from selling watches under his name for four years, thus the new company was named the A. C. Roebuck, Inc. In 1893, when the restriction ended, the firm was renamed Sears, Roebuck and Co., and Richard Sears opened a branch office and shipping depot in Chicago.

In 1895, Richard Sears consolidated all of the company's operations in Chicago. There were a number of reasons for locating in Chicago, not least of which were the convergence of transportation systems and the presence of a thriving industrial base to supply merchandise and to produce the Sears catalog. The city also offered an ample work force, as well as proximity to financial and commercial services.

Richard Sears served as company president until 1908, when he resigned that post and became chairman of the board, remaining as a director until 1913, a year before his death. He is regarded as "one of the great promotional geniuses in American business history." During his leadership, Sears placed a high value on customer service through money-back guarantees, competitive pricing, return policies, and incentives such as coupons. He knew the importance of customer loyalty, stating in ads, "We Can't Afford to Lose a Customer." Testimonials from satisfied customers were included in the catalog, and every effort was made to assure the catalog reader that merchandise was accurately described and offered at the lowest price.

Richard Sears was the creative genius behind the Sears mail-order catalog, or "Big Book," as it came to be known. His mastery of marketing slogans and catch phrases can be observed on the cover of the 1894 catalog with the following declarations: "Book of Bargains: A Money Saver for Everyone," the "Cheapest Supply House on Earth," and claiming "Our trade reaches around the World." In addition to promotion, Sears's northern Minnesota background allowed him to write in a way that spoke to rural and small-town customers.

By 1895 the Sears catalog had expanded to over 500 pages with a vast range of merchandise, including shoes, women's garments and millinery, wagons, fishing tackle, stoves, furniture, china, musical instruments, saddles, firearms, buggies, bicycles, baby carriages and glassware, to name but a few of the types of featured items. According to historian Daniel Boorstin, the catalog was "the Bible of the new rural consumption communities." As such, authors Louis Asher and Edith Heal note in their book, *Send No Money*, "the catalogue was required reading in millions of homes. More than that, it was juicy reading. It was a Dream book, a Wish book, and the whole family cried for it."

The Sears catalog continued to evolve under Richard Sears' direction. In 1897, a color section was incorporated into the catalog, which was enlarged in subsequent years. The company also added a "club order program," encouraging customers to combine orders with friends or neighbors to share in discounts. A "Builders Hardware and Material Section" also appeared that year, selling kits that included everything that a customer needed to construct a house. Specialty catalogs were also published for specific product lines such as bicycles, pianos, paint and cameras.

Despite Richard Sears' retirement in 1908, the Sears mail-order catalog continued to grow and evolve along with the company's product lines through later decades. Product line additions following Sears' retirement that were prominently featured in the catalogs include: the Sears Motor buggy (1909), the electric washing machine (1910), the Sears "Auto-cycle" motorcycle (1911), silk stockings (1912), and generators (1914), which could provide electricity for a home or farm. In 1913, the company produced its first specialty catalog for automobiles.

Today the vintage Sears catalogs provide an invaluable record of the material culture of American life by showing what people both needed and wished for in their everyday lives. They also are a record of American progress and technological advances. In addition to recording the changing scene in America, Sears catalogs represent the work and efforts of thousands of Americans. Edgar Rice Burroughs, who later wrote the Tarzan series, worked for Sears managing one of the stenographic departments from 1906 to 1908. Lauren Bacall, Susan Hayward, Gloria Swanson, Susan Dey, Cheryl Tiegs, and Stephanie Powers all appeared on the pages of Sears catalogs as models. The catalogs also featured other celebrities, including Roy Rodgers, Ted Williams, Al Unser, and Gene Autry.

Julius Rosenwald and the company's move to North Lawndale

Though Richard Sears was the founder of the company, his partner and immediate successor, **Julius Rosenwald (1862-1932)**, guided Sears, Roebuck & Co. through a period of great expansion in the early twentieth century. In 1893 Alvah Roebuck resigned from the company due to poor health, and his one-quarter share in the business was bought by Julius Rosenwald, who had been introduced to Richard Sears by his brother-in-law. Rosenwald became a long-time and prominent Sears executive who helped the company negotiate a period of tremendous growth and was instrumental in the planning of the Sears Mail Order Plan.

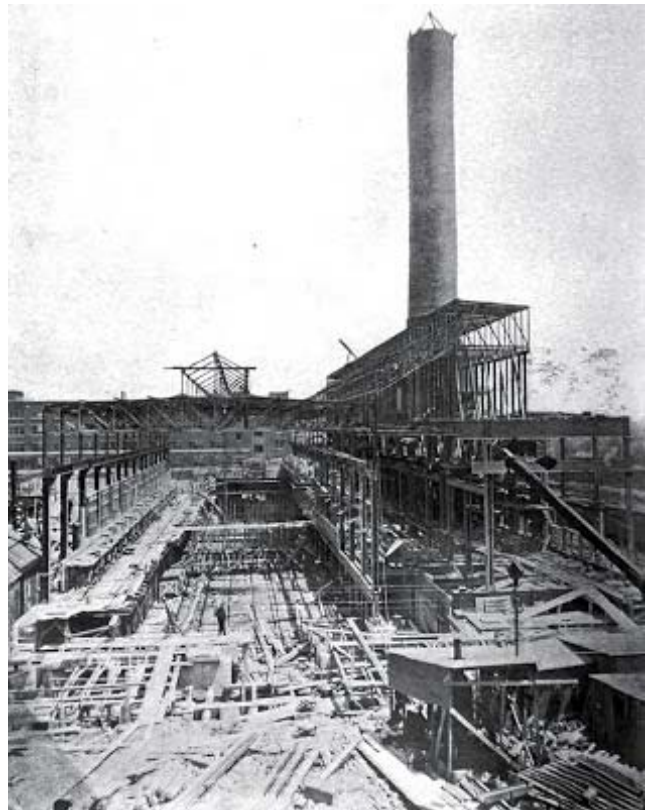
Julius Rosenwald was born in Springfield, Illinois, into a middle-class household of German Jewish immigrant parents. After apprenticing in men's ready-to-wear suit manufacturing in New York, he established his own wholesale clothing company in Chicago in 1885, which began supplying clothing to Sears. In 1896 Rosenwald became vice president of Sears, Roebuck and Co., a position in which he remained until 1908, when he became company president. Based on their respective talents, Sears remained primarily responsible for advertising and sales promotion, while Rosenwald brought much-needed organizational and logistical skills, including the development of the purpose-built headquarters complex and mail-order plant in North Lawndale, which helped move the company into the position of a leading national merchant.

In 1895, when Richard Sears consolidated all of the company's operations in Chicago, Sears, Roebuck & Co. was located in a five-story building at 171-175 W. Adams Street. The company at the time had only 80 employees. By 1900, with over \$10 million in sales, Sears surpassed Montgomery Ward and Co., the Chicago mail-order house that had created the large-scale mail-order business model. However the company's facilities were not keeping pace with its growth. In 1896 the



Julius Rosenwald (left) was company president from 1908 until 1928, remaining as chairman of the board until 1932. Rosenwald's managerial and organizational talent allowed the company to rapidly expand during his tenure. The North Lawndale headquarters and mail-order plant that comprises the Sears, Roebuck & Co. District was built by Rosenwald as a much-needed centralization of company functions and operations, laying the groundwork for the company's tremendous retail accomplishments of the 20th century.

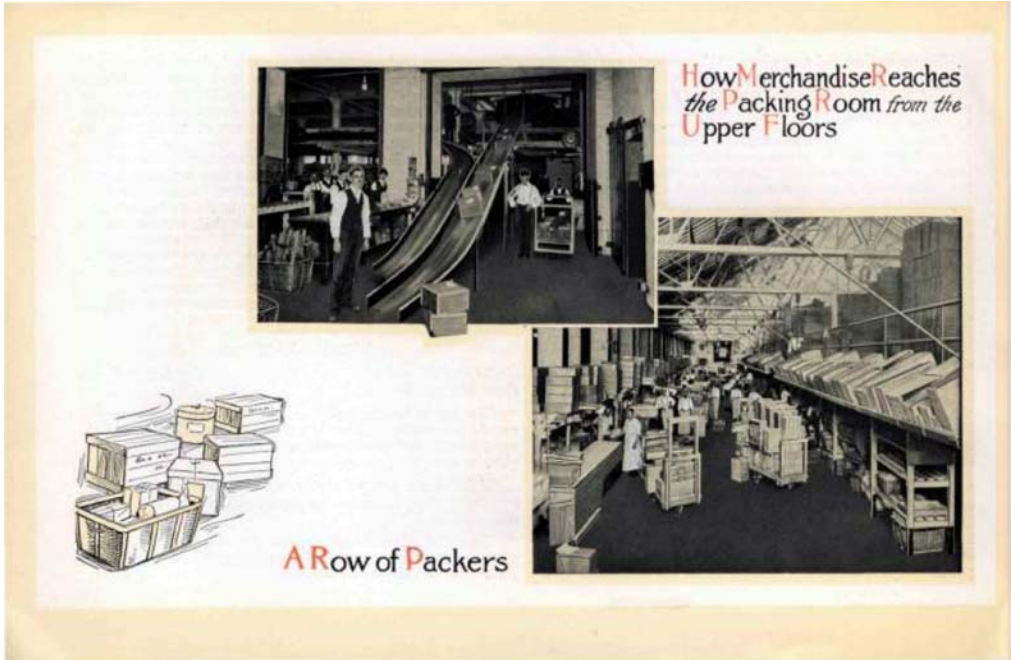
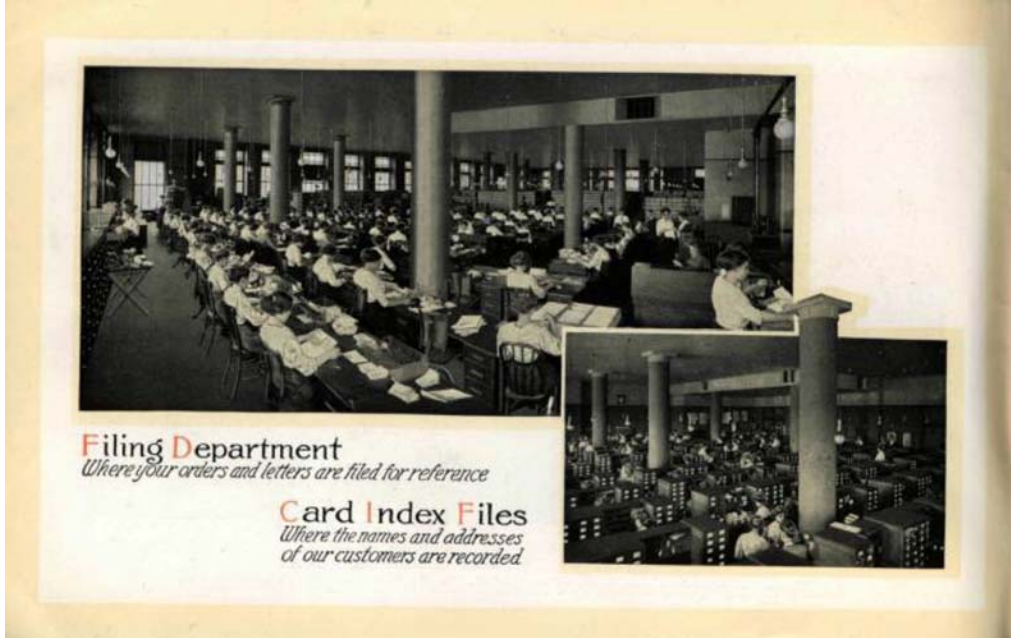
Construction photographs of the Merchandise Building with its distinctive tower (lower left) and the Power House (lower right). In its original form the Sears complex included 4 million square feet of new facilities, yet the construction firm of Thompson-Starrett was able to complete its immense construction in one year.



Sears encouraged visitors to tour its new headquarters as a way to promote the company's image as an efficient and consumer-focused merchandiser. *A Visit To Sears Roebuck and Co.*, an illustrated guidebook of the facilities intended for tourists, provides a glimpse into the operations of the vast complex.

The top image is a birds-eye rendering of the complex, which shows the relationship of the surviving tower with the larger merchandise building. Only the tower survives today.

The middle image shows rooms where orders were received and customer information filed. Orders were filled in the Merchandise Building (bottom image) where chutes moved goods to packers who prepared them for shipment.



company moved to a larger building at the northeast corner of Desplaines and Fulton, on Chicago's Near West Side. However, this facility soon proved inadequate, and in 1898 Sears commissioned architect John M. Van Osdel to construct a large addition to the building. By 1900 the company had expanded into multiple buildings scattered around Chicago, leading to decentralization and disorganization, including the duplication of four separate shipping departments.

Under Rosenwald's lead, Sears, Roebuck & Co. in 1904 began planning a new company headquarters and mail order plant that would centralize all of its operations. Forty-one acres of land were assembled in the North Lawndale neighborhood on Chicago's far West Side. The location had much to offer, including near-by freight rail lines for receiving incoming materials and shipping outgoing orders, as well as elevated train lines that could provide access to the complex by employees and visitors. North Lawndale had been annexed to the city in 1869 and was named "Lawndale" by speculative real estate developers who played up the proximity of the West Side's three large regional parks, including Douglas Park within North Lawndale itself. In 1871 the McCormick Harvesting Machine Company had built a large reaper plant in the area, resulting in the creation of residential communities to house large numbers of workers. Other industrial plants followed, lured by the several railroad lines that served the area.

Rosenwald commissioned the Chicago architectural firm of Nimmons and Fellows to design the new headquarters campus and mail order plant. It originally included the Administration Building, the MDL Building, a three-million square foot Merchandise Building (which would be the largest commercial structure in America when completed), and a Power Plant. Ground was broken on January 24, 1905, and the construction firm of Thompson-Starrett began the immense project of building over 4 million square feet of new facilities. Seven thousand construction workers were needed to complete the project, with 60 freight-car loads of building materials brought to the site each day. On January 22, 1906, roughly one year later, all of Sears' operations were transferred to the new plant.

The new Sears headquarters and mail order plant fulfilled Rosenwald's goals of better company organization, greater efficiency in filling orders and a more sound financial footing. The new Administration Building was described in promotional literature as a "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." For 1906, the first full year in the new facility, Sears had 9,290 employees working at the North Lawndale campus, and sales were more than \$50 million. In the same year Sears first issued stock on the New York Stock Exchange, which provided a desired infusion of capital.

Rosenwald also encouraged and implemented programs for improved employee relations and benefits. The personnel policy stressed self-improvement and individual initiative. General manager Elmer Scott instituted early employee welfare efforts and initiated a plan to provide a training school for employees. As early as 1899 the Seroco Club was formed to improve department managers' relations with their staffs. In 1901 an employee publication *The Skylight*, first appeared, and in 1902 the Seroco Mutual Benefit Association was organized to provide employee insurance. In 1919 health services for employees were provided by an 18-room hospital in the Merchandise Building. The company made arrangements with the Chicago Public Library to circulate books among employees. The Employees Savings Department offered a savings plan with five percent interest, and in 1916, Rosenwald set up "The Savings and Profit-Sharing Pension Fund of Sears Roebuck and Co Employes (*sic*)," whereby Sears contributed a percentage of profits to the fund.

In addition to the still-extant sunken garden and pergola included in this proposed designation, the Sears complex originally included a number of outdoor amenities for its employees. The photo at right is from a 1911 track and field day sponsored by Sears. Generous employee benefits and amenities were a feature of Julius Rosenwald's leadership.



Rosenwald was also one of Chicago's greatest philanthropist whose generosity focused on improving living conditions for African Americans. The Wabash Avenue YMCA at right (built 1914 and a designated Chicago Landmark) was one of several YMCAs that Rosenwald supported in African American neighborhoods within large cities.



Booker T. Washington approached Rosenwald about his concept to build rural schools desperately needed for African American children across the segregated South. That partnership sparked an initiative that eventually created more than 5300 schools, vocational shops and teacher's homes across 15 states in the South and Southwest from 1912-1932. The Pee Dee Colored School in Marion County, South Carolina (right), was one such "Rosenwald School."



Outside his role at Sears, in the area of philanthropy Rosenwald gave generously of his time and money. Inspired by reading *Up From Slavery* and by meeting Booker T. Washington, he supported many programs to benefit the quality of life for African Americans, including the establishment of 5,000 public schools and libraries in the rural South. He is well remembered for sponsoring housing developments such as the progressive Michigan Avenue Garden Apartments (commonly known today as the Rosenwald Apartments), which is located in Chicago's Bronzeville neighborhood and originally marketed to moderate- and low-income African Americans. In 1911, Rosenwald offered \$25,000 toward the construction of individual YMCA buildings in communities that raised a \$75,000 match. Over twelve cities qualified, including Chicago, where the Wabash Avenue YMCA opened its doors to African American men in 1914. (The building is a designated Chicago Landmark as part of the Black Metropolis-Bronzeville District.) On his 50th birthday in 1912, Rosenwald made charitable contributions of \$700,000, including funds to the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama, where he served as a trustee. In 1917, he established the Julius Rosenwald Fund, which gave over \$17 million to his causes. He is also regarded as an important Chicago civic leader, being the principal founder and financial supporter of the Museum of Science and Industry, as well as serving on a number of local institutional boards.

Robert Wood and Sears' development of retail stores

Robert Elkington Wood (1879-1969), who succeeded Rosenwald as president of Sears, oversaw the company's transition from solely mail-order selling to the establishment of a chain of retail stores across America. After graduation from West Point in 1900, followed by an illustrious military career in the Philippines, the Panama Canal, and World War I, Wood became a brigadier general and received a Distinguished Service Medal. In 1919, he became a vice president for merchandising for rival mail-order company Montgomery Ward. Unhappy there, he offered his services to Julius Rosenwald and was hired as vice president of Sears in 1924.

Wood provided strong forward-looking leadership during the Depression and beyond, recognizing that fewer Americans were dependent on mail-order goods as the country became more urbanized. Wood subsequently opened the first Sears retail store in 1925 in the Merchandise Building. He pushed the expansion of Sears into store-based retailing, which allowed it to prosper during the Depression. By the end of the 1920s, there were 300 Sears stores across the country. It was Wood's idea that "most of the company's retail stores could be located in outlying districts which would offer the advantages of lower rentals yet would also, because of the great mobility of Americans, still be within reach of potential customers." Wood proved right, retail sales grew steadily, and by 1931 accounted for more than half of all sales. Retail sales continued to outstrip catalog sales until the catalog was finally abandoned in the 1980's. In 1928 Wood succeeded Rosenwald as president of the company.

Sears, Roebuck and Co. continued to diversify in the late 1920s and 1930s, establishing major national brands, such as Kenmore appliances, Craftsman tools, DieHard automotive supplies, Silvertone radios, Supertone instruments, and Toughskins clothing. Wood sustained the company through the Great Depression by inspiring new and innovative Sears' products and services. He recognized that the automobile was fast becoming a mainstay of American life and that automobile-related services and products would appeal to the customers. In response to this trend, Wood initiated Sears' manufacture and sales of automobile tires. A nationwide naming competition led to the selection of the brand name "Allstate," which soon came to apply to Sears' other automobile supplies and accessories. In 1931, Allstate expanded to offer automobile insurance by direct mail. The Allstate Corporation is now one of the largest personal insurance companies in America. Also



Robert E. Wood (left) and Julius Rosenwald (right) with the 10 millionth Allstate tire in 1929. Wood saw the rising importance of the automobile in American life and added the brand of “Allstate” auto parts and tires to its product lines.

January-February Flyer

Perhaps You Think... **"THIS COULD NEVER HAPPEN TO ME!"**

You've probably heard plenty of car owners say:
 "I'm a careful driver. I don't need automobile insurance... and even if I should have an accident and am sued... I haven't anything."

You'd be surprised how much can be collected from a man who doesn't have automobile insurance... if a judgment is handed down against him.

In most states, judgments are not dismissed until they are fully paid... they haunt you for a lifetime.

ALLSTATE Automobile Insurance protects everything you own at little cost.

ALLSTATE WILL SAVE YOU MONEY

- ★ OFFERS THE CONVENIENCE OF TIME PAYMENTS
- ★ GIVES NATION-WIDE SERVICE
- ★ PAYS ALL JUST CLAIMS PROMPTLY
- ★ ALLSTATE INSURANCE COMPANY (Organized by Sears, Roebuck and Co.) offers complete stock company automobile insurance protection.
- ★ In the states of New York, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, Texas and Virginia, ALLSTATE issues participating policies at standard rates.

MAIL THE COUPON TODAY FOR INFORMATION AND RATES

ALLSTATE INSURANCE COMPANY
(Organized by Sears, Roebuck and Co.)
 Home Office 20 North Wacker Drive Chicago, Illinois

** Without obligation, please send the rates for automobile insurance.

Name _____

Residence Address _____

County _____

Postoffice _____ State _____

Make of Car _____ Type of Body _____

Model _____ Year of Model _____

(Phone, number or name)

Allstate Insurance Company advertisement, ca. 1930. In 1931 Wood added automobile insurance under the Allstate brand to Sears's offerings. The Allstate products and insurance helped Sears survive the Great Depression.



Under Wood's leadership Sears transitioned from a mail-order business to a national chain of retail stores with multiple departments. Built in 1938 for \$1 million, the Sears Store on W. Irving Park Rd. in the Portage Park neighborhood of Chicago was designed by Chicago architects Nimmons, Carr & Wright. The large storefront windows at street level give way to relatively solid walls on upper floors, which were lighted and cooled with artificial light and air conditioning.

under Wood's lead, Sears entered banking in 1931 with the creation of the Sears Community State Bank. By 1938, annual sales were over \$500 million. Wood became board chairman in 1939.

World War II halted expansion of the company. Material rationing and the conversion of factories converted to war work reduced Sears' offerings of durable goods such as refrigerators, stoves, washing machines and fans. As a large number of men entered the service, women made up 75 percent of the Sears workforce during the war. After the war ended, Sears entered a period of expansion that continued through the 1970s. In 1947 sales topped \$3 billion per year and \$5 out of every \$100 spent in the United States for general merchandise went to Sears. When Wood retired in 1954, Sears was America's leading retailer with annual sales in excess of \$3 billion.

Product Testing

Sears, Roebuck and Co. printed its catalogs, including the "Big Book," onsite in what was originally called the Printing Building for almost two decades after its construction in 1905. By the early 1920s, however, the company realized that its catalog printing needs would soon outstrip the capacity of this on-site printing plant. In addition, printing technology had changed substantially in the almost 20 years since the plant had been completed. In 1923, the company outsourced its catalog production to Chicago-based printer R. R. Donnelley & Sons (the Donnelley plant at 350 East Cermak Rd. is a designated Chicago Landmark), and the company's Printing Building was repurposed for product development, research, and testing, a relatively new but rapidly growing field within the retail world. The printing building was renamed the Merchandise Development and Laboratory, or MDL Building and would continue to serve this important company function until the 1970s.

Early on, Sears had recognized that quality merchandise and accurate catalog descriptions were important to the company's success. Sears opened its first laboratory at its North Lawndale complex in 1911 and, in time, the laboratory became known as the "watchdog of the catalog." Product testing helped the company set quality standards for their products. The lab also performed spot-testing of mail-order merchandise and conducted performance tests that compared the products sold by Sears with those of its competitors.

Because the company offered a "full satisfaction" guarantee, it was important that Sears maintain quality control over all of its products. An early the 1920s, Sears promotional brochures showed scientists in white laboratory coats in a "Scientific Laboratory," with a caption explaining how rigorous testing of all Sears merchandise "enables us to buy more wisely and describe more accurately and to select merchandise that may be depended upon to give our customers the service they have a right to expect."

Home economist and chemist Elizabeth Weirick emerged as a leader in Sears' product testing laboratory, being named director of the technological laboratories in 1929. Weirick had studied chemistry at the University of Chicago during the 1910s and then had entered the home economics profession soon after graduation, teaching chemistry at the Pratt Institute School of Household Science and Arts in Brooklyn, New York. In 1919, Weirick was hired to head the then recently-established textile division of the Sears product testing laboratory. Weirick guided the division through a decade of growth and expansion, enlarging the textile and chemical divisions from a few people to more than eighty scientists and technicians by the time of her retirement in 1940. During her tenure, Weirick also established new mechanical, electrical, home economics, design and library divisions of the merchandise and testing laboratories.

The labs in the MDL Building worked collectively as a service bureau to Sears' advertising departments, manufacturers, and wholesale buyers. Through extensive testing under household conditions, the labs were able to help Sears select what merchandise to carry. The various divisions of the laboratory also made recommendations to manufacturers on ways to improve their merchandise and worked out standard product specifications for buyers. Additionally, the laboratory conducted research to develop new products or new features for existing products. Other responsibilities of the Merchandise Development and Laboratory included implementing and supervising quality control of stock merchandise, writing instructions for the care and use of merchandise, and investigating customer complaints.

By 1960, the Sears test laboratories, which had their origins in a single room, had grown to occupy over 75,000 square feet in the MDL Building. A laboratory branch that tested textiles had also been established in New York, while paints, boat motors, and lawn mowers were tested at a special facility in Florida. That same year, Sears chemists, physicists, and engineers staffing the laboratories completed their six millionth individual product test. A 1961 profile of the Sears laboratories in *Life* magazine discussed the laboratories' purpose. The article stated it was:

Simply to help Sears give you better and better value for your money. By making sure that shoddy goods do not find their way onto the shelves of Sears stores or into the Sears catalog. By developing new products – and improving old ones. By constantly comparing Sears merchandise with similar items sold elsewhere – so that nobody steals a march on Sears with any quality or price advantage. That's why the Sears laboratory exists. And why it has absolute veto power over any product that does not measure up to its standards.

The impact Sears had on consumer goods was far-reaching as the company, in 1961, maintained the largest merchandise testing and development laboratory of any retail organization in the United States.

RECENT HISTORY OF THE SEARS COMPANY

In 1969, Sears announced plans to build a new headquarters building in downtown Chicago. When the 110-story Sears Tower (now Willis Tower) opened in 1973, it was the world's tallest building. Despite the prominence of the new tower headquarters, Sears' profits in the 1970s were declining due to competition from other discount retail chains such as Kmart. In 1980 Sears undertook a major corporate restructuring that included the acquisition of financial service and real estate companies. In 1993 the unprofitable catalog operation and underperforming stores were closed. In 2004 Kmart Holdings Corporation purchased Sears, and the new company was renamed Sears Holdings Corporation, which continues to operate stores under both the Sears and Kmart brands.

When Sears opened its downtown tower in 1973, much of the old West Side headquarters was vacated, though it was not until 1987 when all Sears operations moved out. The vacant plant beleaguered the surrounding North Lawndale neighborhood, which itself lost more than 60 per cent of its population and more than 50 percent of its housing stock from the 1960s through 1995.

In 1988 former Sears CEO Edward Brennan recruited Chicago developer Charles H. Shaw (1933-2006) to help redevelop the Sears complex as Homan Square. Sears, Roebuck and Co. and Shaw formed the non-profit partnership West Side Affordable Housing Inc. In 1992 ground was broken

for the first 80 of what would become 300 new units of housing, a new community center, YMCA, grade schools and high schools. The Homan Square redevelopment has gained national recognition as a model of urban revitalization.

The redevelopment plans continue under the Foundation for Homan Square, a not-for-profit organization. In 2009 the Foundation spearheaded the restoration and adaptation of the 1905 Power House into a modern public charter high school, a project which has won numerous awards in the areas of historic preservation, energy efficiency and education.

MAIL-ORDER COMPANIES IN CHICAGO

By the turn of the twentieth century, Chicago was the major center for mail-order retailers in the United States. “Mail-order houses,” as these retailers were commonly known, were a distinctly American retailing innovation that developed in response to the needs of a primarily rural citizenry spread over a vast area. In comparison to mail order offerings, country stores offered small inventories of overpriced products.

The heyday of the mail-order business occurred between the 1890s and the 1910s, when it was dominated by Chicago-based companies Sears, Roebuck and Co. and Montgomery Ward. During this period, these companies became two of the largest business enterprises in the United States. Chicago’s central location and its network of railroads made the city a logical choice for the mail-order trade. By the turn of the century, Chicago had emerged as the most important railroad center in the country, with more lines of track radiating in more directions than any other city. The system of railroads connected the city to the Midwest’s agriculture-producing regions which made Chicago the central point of the grain, livestock, and meat packing industries. Early mail-order retailers recognized that the system of rail lines that brought grain and livestock into Chicago for processing could also be used as a distribution system that delivered finished goods cheaply and efficiently to those same far-flung farming communities. Moreover, Chicago’s reputation as a major manufacturing center meant that many of the goods sold by mail order retailers – from candy to furniture – were made by Chicago companies.

The first large retailer to use catalogs as its primary promotional tool and to sell directly to the rural consumer was Chicago-based Montgomery Ward. Aaron Montgomery Ward, a New Jersey native, came to Chicago in 1866 and went to work for large dry-goods business of Field, Palmer, & Leiter (which would later become Marshall Field & Co.). There Ward worked as a field representative selling products in rural areas. In 1872 Ward struck out on his own with an innovative mail-order business that marketed and sold items directly to rural consumers. .

Ward’s first catalog in August 1872 was a single-sheet price list of 163 items; in a mere two years the catalog had grown to over 100 pages with over 25,000 items ranging from clothing to steam engines. In 1875, the company instituted an unprecedented policy that promised “satisfaction guaranteed or your money back.” By the early 1900s, Wards employed over 7,000 men and women in Chicago and was selling tens of millions of dollars in goods annually. The Montgomery Ward & Co. Catalog House at 600-618 W. Chicago Avenue (1907-1908) is a designated Chicago Landmark, while the Montgomery Ward Building at 6 N. Michigan Avenue, designed by Richard E. Schmidt and begun in 1899, is located within the Historic Michigan Boulevard Chicago Landmark District.

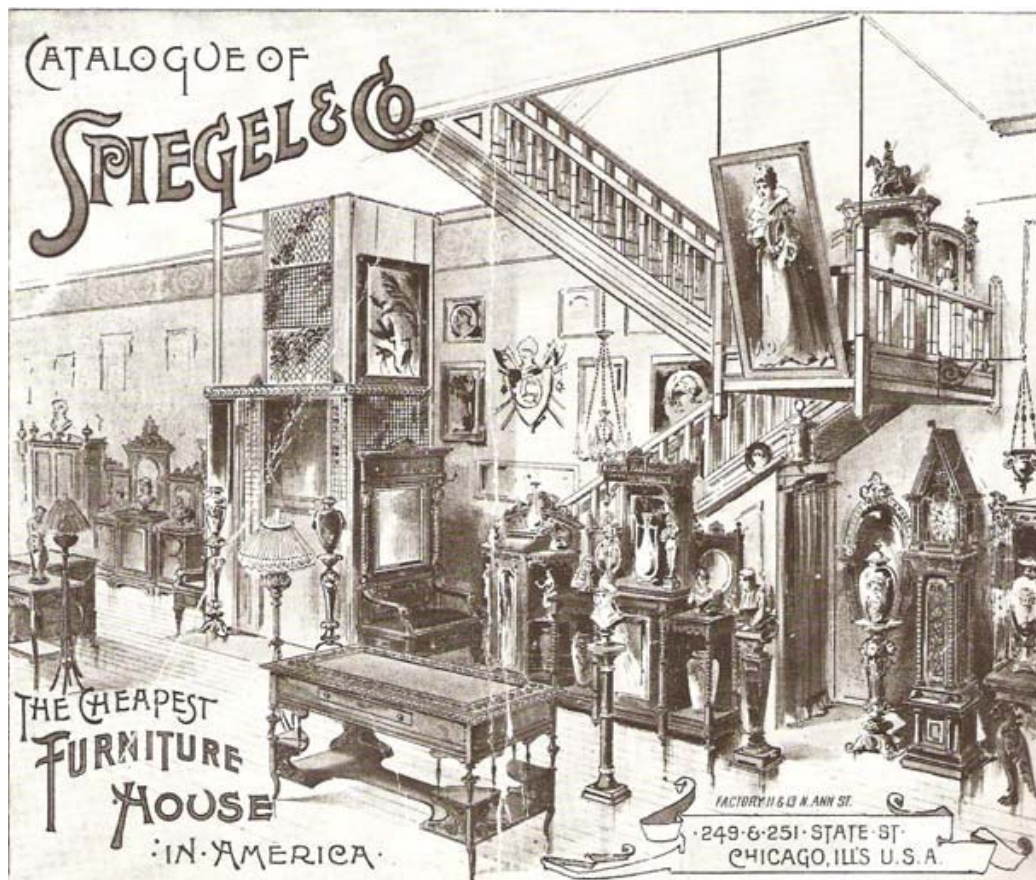
Chicago, with its central location, unparalleled network of railroads, and well-established manufacturing operations, became America's center for mail-order retail in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The first large-scale mail-order business in the country was founded in Chicago in 1872 by Aaron Montgomery Ward.

Top: The Montgomery Ward & Company Catalog Plant at 600 West Chicago Avenue, completed in 1907-1908 (a designated Chicago Landmark).
Bottom: A cutaway view of the Montgomery Ward & Company Building at 6 North Michigan Avenue, located in the Historic Michigan Boulevard Chicago Landmark District.



Sears found even greater success in the mail-order business by closely mimicking Montgomery Ward's strategies. Like Ward, Sears issued giant catalogs with a wide range of good and marketed primarily to rural consumers. Sears also entered the mail-order market just as major postal reforms were drastically reducing the cost of bulk mailings and rural parcel delivery across the nation. After only a few years in operation, Sears surpassed Ward as the nation's leading mail-order company.

By the early part of the twentieth century mail-order retailing had become a major sector of the American economy, through which millions of rural consumers purchased a variety of goods. This development was part of a general trend in which commodity consumption by individuals and households was taking on greater economic and cultural significance. By 1919, Americans were buying over \$500 million worth of goods a year from mail-order companies (roughly half of this business went to Sears and Wards alone). For the companies, mail-order retailing proved to be an efficient and extremely lucrative means of reaching an almost limitless pool of new customers. Taken together, Sears and Montgomery Ward sold over \$400 million of goods annually by 1925. Sears' mail-order sales alone accounted for over 2 percent of the nation's total farm cash income in 1925. While the industry was dominated by these two companies, Chicago was home to hundreds of smaller, specialty mail-order businesses that sold merchandise ranging from bicycles, roller skates, prefabricated houses and furniture, suits, furs and veterinary supplies, all available for delivery by mail.



A view of the Spiegel company catalog that dates from the 1890s. Based in Chicago, Spiegel was the third-largest mail-order company in the nation, and its Administration Building in Bridgeport, built between 1936 and 1942, is a designated Chicago Landmark.

BUILDING CATALOG

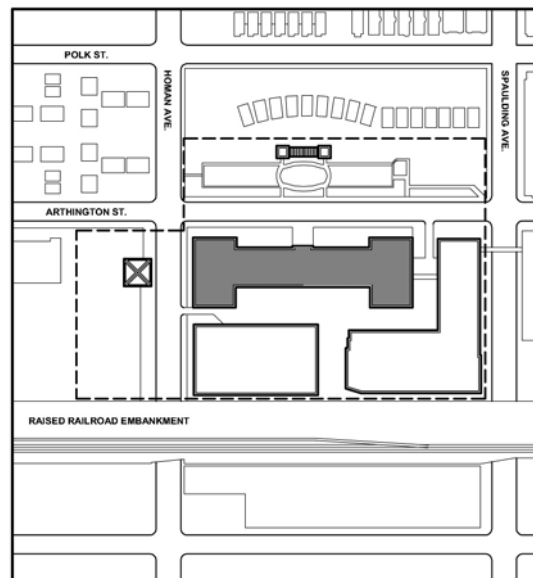
The Sears, Roebuck & Co. District consists of four buildings and a park with pergola situated on eight acres of land centered around the intersection of S. Homan Ave. and W. Arthington St. The district is visually anchored by the five-story Administration Building, stretching roughly 500 feet along the south side of W. Arthington St. To the east, on the southwest corner of W. Arthington St. and S. Spaulding Ave., stands the Printing/Merchandise Development and Laboratory (MDL) Building, a six-story brick building measuring 315 by 100 feet in plan. The 14-story Merchandise Building Tower (a remnant of the much larger Merchandise Building demolished in 1995) is located to the west of the Administration Building across S. Homan Ave. The Power House, with its 236-foot-tall brick chimney, is located between the Administration Building to the north and the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad right-of-way to the south and faces Homan Ave. A small park with pergola, built by Sears as an amenity for its employees and the surrounding neighborhood, occupies a parcel of land along the north side of W. Arthington St., across from the Administration and MDL buildings.

1. Administration Building 3333 West Arthington St.

Built: 1905 (original two-story building)
1914 (top three stories)

Architects: Nimmons and Fellows (1905)
George C. Nimmons and Co. (1914)

The Administration Building was designed and constructed as the executive headquarters for Sears, Roebuck and Co. in 1905, and it continued that function until 1973, when the company moved to the Sears Tower (now Willis Tower) in downtown Chicago. The Administration Building was designated as a Chicago Landmark in 2002.



Sears, Roebuck and Co. District

● Administration Building

Above left: The primary façade of the Administration Building with its Classical-style entrance portico. Above right: A map of the district with the Administration Building shaded in gray.



Top: The primary façade of the Administration Building combines Chicago School principles with Classical- and Prairie-Style decoration. Bottom left: The finely proportioned and detailed entrance portico with its polished granite columns. Bottom right: A detail of the cornice above the second floor of the building with Prairie-school styled organic ornament.

The long primary façade of the Administration Building facing Arthington Street presents a formal and symmetrical arrangement of dark-red brick and terra-cotta detailing with an ornate, projecting entry portico. The entrance portico and other Classical Revival details are applied to an otherwise Chicago School design characterized by projecting piers, recessed spandrels and a grid-like fenestration pattern typical of the Chicago School. Horizontal beltcourses, organic ornamentation and peaked parapets at the building's cornice reflect the influence of the Prairie School on architects George C. Nimmons and William K. Fellows. The ornate facade treatments are extended around to the west and east elevations of the building. The south elevation is mostly obscured by the Power House and more simply treated with common brick.

The main entrance is set within a projecting portico at the central bay of the north facade. The entablature directly above the tri-partite entry carries the words, "Sears, Roebuck, and Co." Another ornamental entablature at the top of the portico carries the words "Administration Building." A secondary street entrance, which has been altered, is located at the center bay of the west street facade. The building has wood-framed, double-hung windows throughout, with divided light transoms at the lower floors.

The building's main lobby, entered from the north entrance, retains a geometric-patterned marble floor, ornamental cornice, and decorative wall moldings. A staircase leading up half a flight from the lobby to the first-floor main corridor has an ornamental metal railing. Secondary interior staircases also retain original iron railings and posts. Other interior spaces, including executive and clerical offices and support spaces, have been extensively remodeled over the years.

The Administration Building served a number of different functions for Sears. In addition to the executive offices, the building housed the entire clerical force which received mail and dispatched orders to the Merchandise Building (demolished with the exception of the Tower). The building housed employee dining facilities, including separate Men's and Women's cafeterias, a Grill Room, and a Dining Room, which together provided meals for 9,000 employees. Other employee amenities in the building included a Recreation Room and Library.

The circa 1908 photograph at right shows the Administration Building before the addition of the top three stories in 1914. The formal plantings in the foreground were located in the sunken garden which was built by Sears as an outdoor amenity for its employees. Though the plantings have changed, the sunken garden and pergola survive and are proposed for inclusion in the District.

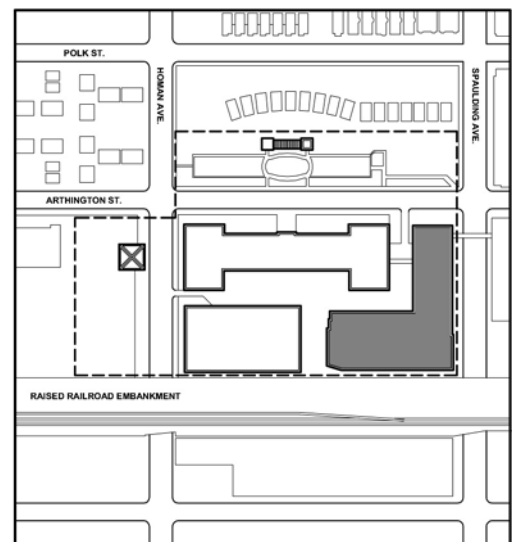


2. Printing/Merchandise Development and Laboratory (MDL) Building 3301 W. Arthington St.

Built: 1905 (4-Story Building)
1909-1912 (4-Story Rear Annex)
1916 (Two-story rooftop addition to 1905 building)
Architects: Nimmons and Fellows (1905)
George C. Nimmons and Co. (1909-1912; 1916)

Built in 1905 and expanded over the next 11 years, the Printing/Merchandise Development and Laboratory (MDL) Building was an essential building in the Sears, Roebuck and Company complex and was occupied by the company until 1973. The MDL Building was purpose-built by Sears to serve as the company's printing facility, and the company's catalog was printed in the building from 1905 to 1923 when Sears outsourced its catalog printings to Chicago-based printer R. R. Donnelley & Sons. The building was renamed the Merchandise Development and Laboratory Building and for more than 40 years it served as the company's product research facility as Sears became a pioneer in the newly-emerging field of product testing.

The MDL Building is a six-story, L-shaped structure with exterior masonry walls of red brick and a flat roof with rooftop monitors, which are raised extensions above the roofline that contain skylights. The building took its final form through three major building phases. The original four-story building, consisting of a rectangular block oriented north-south along S. Spaulding Ave. between W. Arthington St. and a railroad embankment, was constructed in 1905 utilizing concrete post-and-beam construction. Between 1909 and 1912, a four-story rear annex of reinforced concrete and steel was constructed near the south end of the building, extending west along the adjacent railroad embankment. In 1916, an additional two floors were added to the original 1905 building. A small one-story



Sears, Roebuck and Co. District

● Printing/Merchandise Development and Laboratory (MDL) Building

Above left: The north and west facades of the Printing/Merchandise Development and Laboratory (MDL) Building as viewed from S. Spaulding Ave. Above right: A map of the district with the MDL Building shaded in gray.



Top left: Limestone pier detailing on the west elevation of the MDL Building. bottom left: Arched window detail on the east elevation.

Right: The MDL Building is ornamented with the Insignia of Europe's earliest printing houses, executed in terra cotta. From top to bottom, these insignia are associated with Guillaume Rouille, William Caxton, and Jehan Frelon.

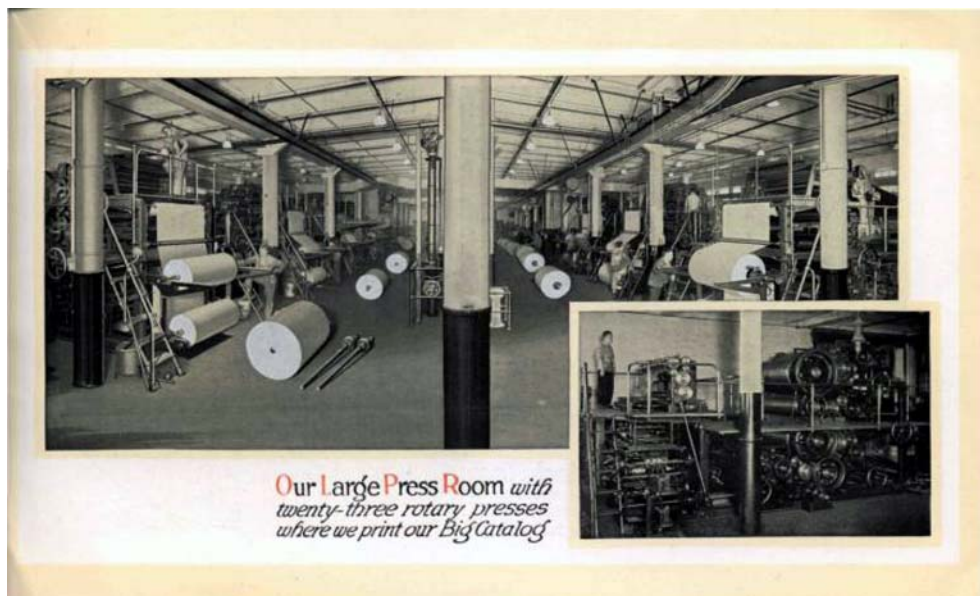
addition and a two-story loading dock were also added to the south elevation of the annex in the mid-1910s.

Although constructed over the course of a decade, all of the building's exterior elevations are consistent in materials and detailing, with walls of pressed red brick detailed with corbelling at the fourth-floor cornice line. With the exception of the west end of the annex, all elevations are regularly fenestrated with double-hung windows in groups of two or three, set in rectangular openings with terra cotta or limestone lintels and sills. Fourth- and sixth-floor windows are set within recessed segmental-arched openings.

The north, east, and west elevations of the 1905 building feature a coursed limestone base and water table (now painted white), a projecting brick and limestone belt course with scrolled brackets above the first floor, and a corbelled brick cornice above the fourth floor, marking the original top of the building. Along the south half of the west elevation a raised loading dock is covered by a metal shed roof; the loading dock is not original to the building but was in place by the early 1920s.

While the MDL Building was conceived as an industrial building, and most of the building is simply detailed, it is ornamented with intricate polychrome terra cotta "rondelles," or circular medallions, that depict a series of early "printers' marks" – symbols historically associated with famous printers in history. These marks include the intertwined initials of William Caxton, England's first printer; the Aldine anchor used by Aldus Manutius in Venice; and the crab and moth motif of French printer Jehan Frellon. These rondelles are inset between arched window openings at the fourth floor on all elevations except the west and south elevations of the rear annex.

Typical of early-twentieth-century industrial buildings, the interior of the MDL Building was designed to be open and utilitarian, with very few permanent partitions other than masonry firewalls. Historic photographs taken when the building operated as a Sears printing facility show long rows of machinery and employees working in open, unobstructed spaces. Enclosed laboratories were inserted into the building after its conversion from printing to product testing in 1923.



Left: A page from the 1914 *A Visit To Sears Roebuck and Co.* guidebook showing the printing operations that were originally located in the MDL Building. The plant required one hundred typesetters alone.

3. Remaining Tower of the Merchandise Building 900 S. Homan Ave.

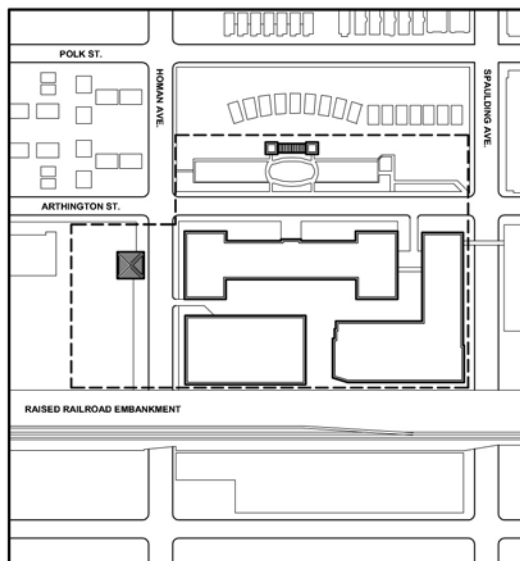
Built: 1906

Architect: Nimmons and Fellows

The Merchandise Building Tower was designed by architects Nimmons & Fellows and completed in 1906 as part of the Sears, Roebuck and Co.'s sprawling Merchandise Building, the center of the company's mail-order operation. The nine-story Merchandise Building was one block wide and one quarter of a mile long, and enclosed three million square feet of manufacturing, processing, and shipping facilities, including an interior freight train shed that could accommodate 40 rail cars.

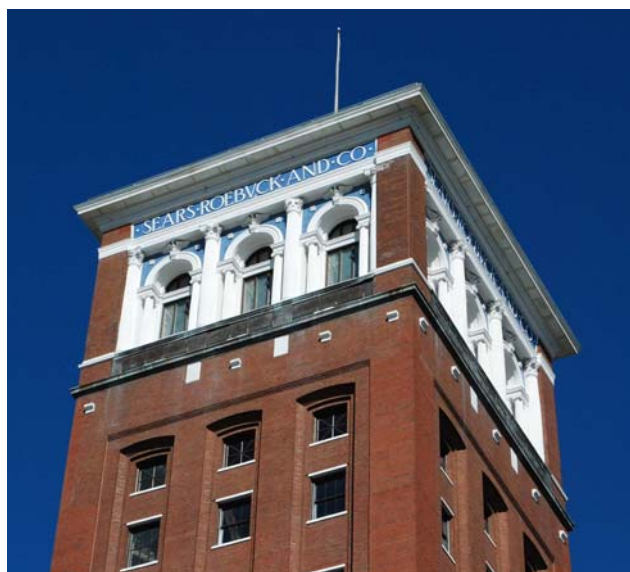
Pursuant to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, a consultation process was initiated in 1993 when the City of Chicago's Department of Planning and Development determined that the Merchandise Building was "functionally obsolete and economically unfeasible for reuse for industrial, retailing, office, residential or institutional uses." Parties to the consultation process included the City of Chicago, the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Advisory Council on Historic Preservation, and the Westside Affordable Housing Limited Partnership (a non-profit partnership of Sears Roebuck, and Co and Charles H. Shaw).

The consultation culminated in a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) signed by the consulting parties. The MOA authorized the Westside Affordable Housing Limited Partnership to demolish the Merchandise Building with the exception of the Tower, which was required to be protected and stabilized. This mitigated the adverse effects of the demolition. Westside Affordable Housing Limited Partnership and the City of Chicago were required to complete a documentation of the structure with photos and drawings which were submitted to the National Park Service.



Sears, Roebuck and Co. District

● Merchandise Building Tower



Above left: A map of the district with the Remaining Tower of the Merchandise Building shaded in gray. Above right: A detail of the tower balconies with their Classical-style detailing rendered in white and blue terra-cotta.



Left: The 14-story tower is a prominent visual feature in the surrounding neighborhood and an evocative reminder of the massive Merchandise Building (upper right) at the Sears complex. The wall areas where the tower originally connected to the Merchandise Building, roughly the first through the ninth floors on the west elevation and portions of the north and south elevations, are common brick with no window openings

Lower right: The terra-cotta detailing of the balconies at the top of the tower.

Furthermore, the MOA required that any future rehabilitation or renovation of historic buildings at the complex must comply with the Secretary of the Interiors *Standards for Rehabilitation and Guidelines for Rehabilitating Historic Buildings*.

Fronting on South Homan Avenue, the Merchandise Building Tower is a 14-story square red-brick structure with a substantial limestone base, regular fenestration along its east and south facades, and a pyramidal clay tile roof. The wall areas where the tower originally connected to the Merchandise Building, roughly the first through the ninth floors on the west elevation and portions of the north and south elevations, are common brick with no window openings. The top of the Tower is detailed with balconies and blue and white Classical Revival-style terra-cotta ornament and large arched window openings. The Tower's cornice is emblazoned with "Sears-Roebuck-And-Co" in white letters on a blue terra-cotta background. Terra-cotta eagles perch atop the hoodmolds above each window.

The Tower originally served as a formal entrance to the Merchandise Building and housed support spaces for the Sears, Roebuck and Co. Administration Building just east across Homan Avenue. The Tower's basement originally served as a node for the site's complex system of underground pedestrian tunnels that connected the various buildings. On its upper floors, the Tower contained an open north end stair core, offices for company staff, and four floors of secretarial training facilities for Sears workers learning stenography, typing, and dictation. The double-height 12th and 13th floors housed tanks which supplied water to the complex's extensive fire sprinkler system.

At the time of its completion in 1906, the 250-foot Tower was the tallest structure in Chicago outside of downtown and soon became the most recognized structure associated with the Sears company brand. Images of the Tower were prominently displayed in early Sears catalogs and in literature touting the company's modern new headquarters. Images of the Tower were also used to market Sears' "Tower" line of office supplies and watches. From 1924 to 1928, the Tower was the home of WLS, one of Chicago's first and longest-lived radio stations, created by Sears, Roebuck and Co. to reach rural consumers with a mission of "Bringing the World to the Farm." WLS, short for "World's Largest Store," broadcast for several hours a day from its studio on the Tower's 11th floor and soon reached millions of listeners across the Upper Midwest.



Above left: A circa 1950 aerial view of the Sears complex showing the tower's original relationship to the rest of the Merchandise Building.

4. Power House

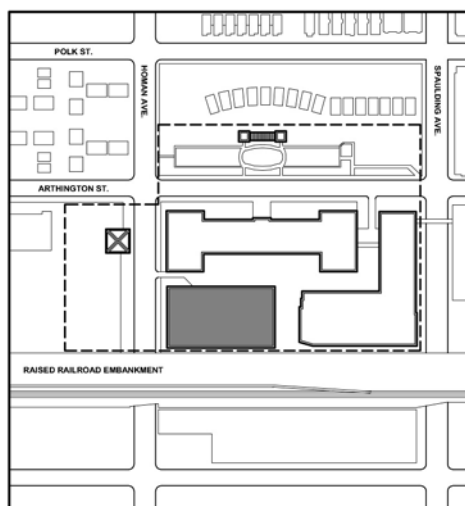
931 S. Homan Ave.

Built: 1906

Architect: Nimmons and Fellows

The Power House is a one-story plus raised basement structure clad in red pressed brick with a limestone block base. The raised first floor is regularly fenestrated with large arched windows topped by groupings of small square-shaped windows. Inset in the piers between arched window openings along the north elevation are polychrome glazed terra cotta rondelles depicting themes of energy and electricity. The north half of the building has a flat roof and encloses the double-height engine room, which retains its original red and white tile floors and white glazed brick walls. The south half of the building facing the former Baltimore & Ohio Railroad line has a stepped gable roof and originally housed the boiler room and coal handling equipment. The south face of the building retains its extensive original fire escape system and an original steel truss once used to support a gantry crane that extended over the adjacent railroad tracks.

The Power House served as the primary source of electric power for the entire Sears Mail Order Plant until the company moved to its new downtown Chicago headquarters in 1973. With a footprint of nearly three quarters of an acre at its completion, the Power House was believed at the time to be the largest commercially-owned structure of its kind in the world. Inside the Power House's large engine room, steam-driven turbines generated electricity for the entire complex. As with most structures in Sears' North Lawndale campus, the Power House became a destination for visitors, who were invited to watch the activity on the busy engine room floor from a suspended visitors gallery.



Sears, Roebuck and Co. District

● Power House



Above left: A map of the district with the Power Plant shaded in gray. Above right: The primary facade of the Power House facing west onto Homan Avenue.



Figure A

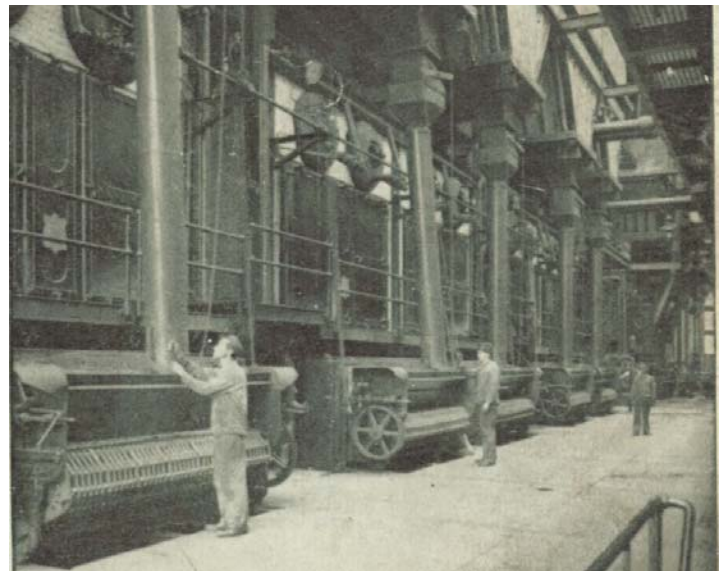


Figure B

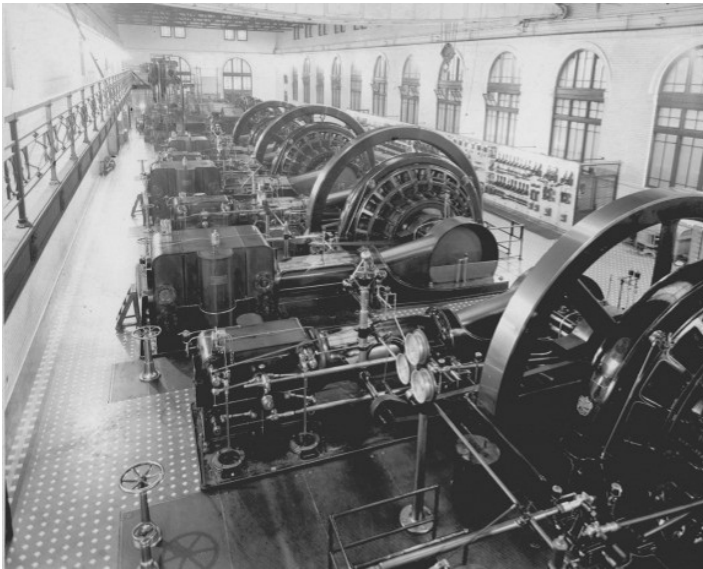


Figure C

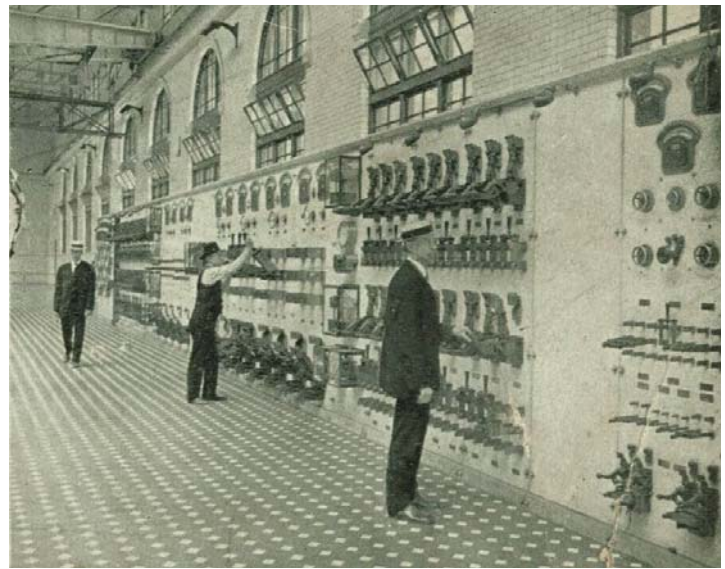
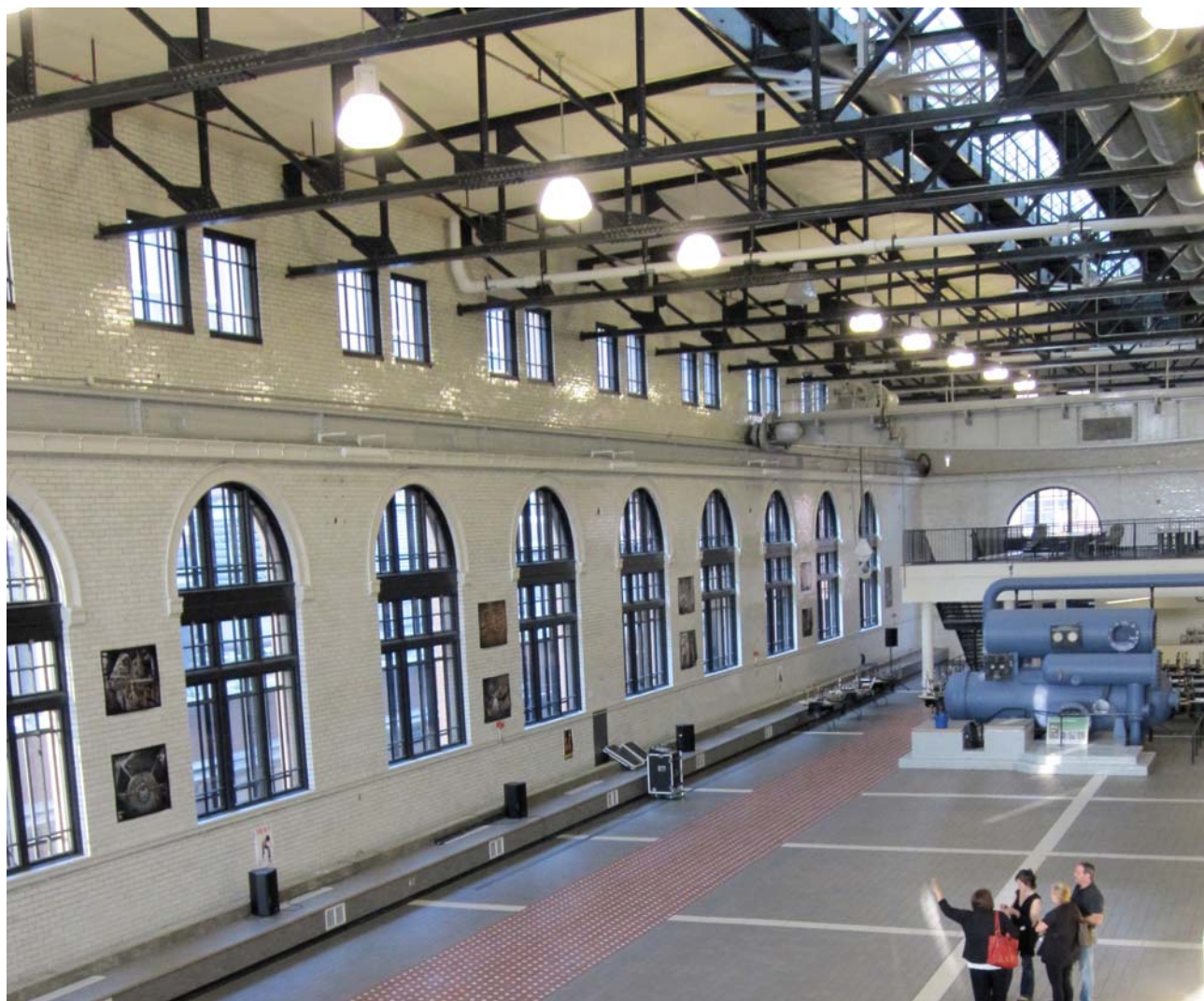


Figure D

Historic photographs of the Power House document its original process. Coal was brought to the building on rail cars (*Figure A*) located adjacent to the building. The coal was burned in boilers (*Figure B*) to create high pressure steam, which in turn powered turbines (*Figure C*), which created electricity that was distributed to the entire complex via a switchgear room (*Figure D*). Steam was also distributed to the other buildings to provide heating.

After Sears left the campus in 1973, the Power House continued operation at a limited capacity as operations and staffing at the plant declined. The building was decommissioned in 2004 and stood vacant until 2009, when it was rehabilitated as the Charles H. Shaw Technology and Learning Center, a public charter high school. Owned by the Homan Arthington Foundation, the Power House's rehabilitation utilized the federal historic rehabilitation tax credit incentive. The building's monumental engine room was preserved, as well as many of the building's character-defining industrial features, including original wood windows, turbines, hoppers, a coal ash conveyor belt, boilers, steam piping, and sliding fire doors. The 185-foot brick chimney was also retained and repaired in part with a grant from the Partners in Preservation program, a partnership of the National Trust for Historic Preservation and American Express Foundation.



Above: A current view of the Power House interior. In 2012 the building was rehabilitated to house a high school, the Charles H. Shaw Technology and Learning Center. The project earned numerous rewards for historic preservation and included the restoration of the building, including its chimney, windows and doors, and even the retention of some of the original power-generating machinery.

5. Park and Pergola

North side of West Arthington Street between South Homan Avenue and South Spaulding Avenue

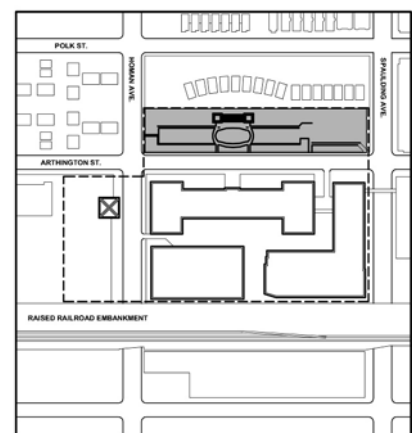
Built: 1907

Architect: Nimmons and Fellows (pergola)
Unknown (landscape plan)

The Sears, Roebuck and Co. park, commonly known as the “sunken garden,” occupies a rectangular plot along the north side of W. Arthington St. between S. Homan Ave. and S. Spaulding Ave., just north of the former Administration Building and the MDL Building. The sunken garden was completed around 1907 shortly after Sears’ North Lawndale complex opened. The pergola centered within the sunken garden was designed by Nimmons & Fellows, however the landscape architect responsible for the formal garden plan remains unknown.

The sunken garden was one of several outdoor activity spaces designed by Nimmons & Fellows for the Sears complex. The plant originally also included an athletic field and running track, sixteen tennis courts, and men’s and women’s clubhouses; all of these outdoor amenities have been demolished. The sunken garden is the only planned outdoor space that survives on the Sears campus.

The sunken garden served as an elegant formal entrance to the Sears complex and blocked views of the residential properties to the north that were inconsistent with the strictly-controlled aesthetic of the Sears complex. The garden, along with other outdoor amenities, was described by Sears promotional literature as “a popular retreat for our employees, and one of the most unique and decorative structures in Chicago.” Workers on lunchtime breaks were invited to “disport themselves in play and recreation” among the concrete walks, fountains, pools (often filled with goldfish), and flower beds supplied year-round by onsite greenhouses, all within a sunken site set apart from the noise and bustle of the surrounding mail order complex. The company also regularly hosted worker events and activities in the sunken garden, including live performances of the 60-piece Sears, Roebuck and Company band. “We believe,” read Sears promotional literature c.1920, “these surroundings inspire our workers to better things and make for contentment and happiness.”



Sears, Roebuck and Co. District
● Park and Pergola

Above left: The sunken garden with pergola was added to the Sears complex in 1907 as a retreat for employees from the bustle of commercial activity. Above right: A map of the district with the garden and pergola shaded in gray.

The centerpiece of the garden is its Classical-inspired pergola, located along the north edge of the garden and symmetrically aligned with the Administration Building's main entrance just south of the garden. The pergola's wood beams were supported by colonnades of Doric columns and balanced at each end by two Doric temple pavilions clad in white stucco and topped with red clay-tile roofs. The pergola remains intact, as do the garden's original concrete planting urns that mark entries to the garden. Though the garden's original fountains and ponds have been filled in, surviving original concrete walks and flower bed locations still express the garden's original design.



Above left: A view of one of the Classical-style pavilions that flank the pergola. The combination of landscape and architecture contributed to the overall aesthetic of the complex which was a statement of the values of Sears as a company. Above right: The garden and pergola also served as a screen which obscured the jumble of tightly crowded flat-buildings just outside the complex as shown in this circa 1950 photo from the roof of the Administration Building.

ARCHITECTS NIMMONS & FELLOWS AND GEORGE C. NIMMONS AND CO.

The original buildings in the Sears, Roebuck & Co. District was designed by the Chicago architecture firm of **Nimmons & Fellows**, while later building expansions were the work of the successor firm of **George C. Nimmons and Co.** The partnership of **George Croll Nimmons (1867-1947)** and **William Kinne Fellows (1870-1948)** was established in 1898 and lasted until 1910, when the latter left and founded a new practice with Dwight H. Perkins and John L. Hamilton (Perkins, Fellows & Hamilton). Nimmons' solo practice then became known as George C. Nimmons and Co.

Nimmons & Fellows, and Nimmons on his own, are best known for their large-scale industrial and commercial buildings, many of which are located in Chicago. Their architectural style incorporates elements of the Prairie School in outwardly utilitarian buildings that are often considered to be part of the "Chicago School," a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century architectural movement that eschewed elaborate historic styles in favor of visual simplicity and a forthright expression of form and structure.

George C. Nimmons was born in Wooster, Ohio, in 1867. He studied architecture in Europe before entering the office of noteworthy Chicago architects Burnham & Root in 1885, where he would later assume responsibility for much of Root's remaining work following his untimely death in 1891.

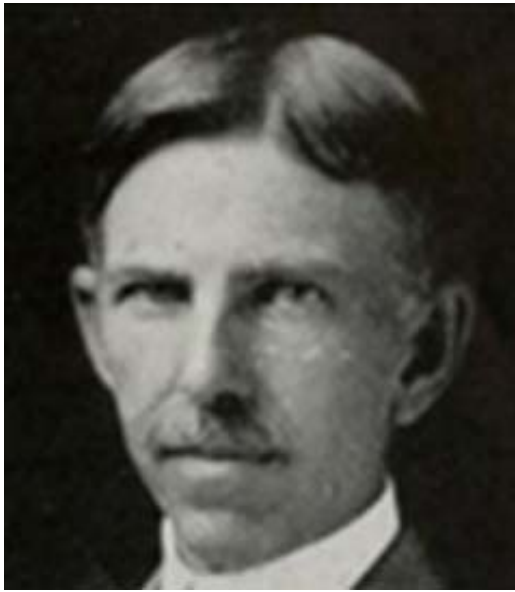
In 1897 he formed the partnership of Nimmons and Fellows with William K. Fellows. Fellows were born in 1870 in Winona, Minnesota. He studied at the Columbia University School of Mines and Architecture, and then trained in several architectural offices in New York City before studying in Europe. He then settled in Chicago and, shortly thereafter, joined Nimmons in their new partnership.

During the 1910s and 1920s, Nimmons published numerous articles in leading architectural journals such as *Architectural Record* and *American Architect* discussing industrial design. Nimmons believed more attention needed to be paid to the design of industrial buildings, not just functionally but aesthetically as well. In a 1926 article published in *American Architect*, Nimmons wrote,

In designing industrial buildings, there is an opportunity for an architect to make them attractive and even beautiful in appearance at little or no extra expense. In every industrial building there are certain elements necessary for its construction such as window sills, lintels, copings, piers, doorways, windows, etc., which are capable of being molded into attractive forms and grouped into pleasing combinations or made to accent different features of the façade in a way that will create a good architectural design.

Nimmons also believed good design could improve working conditions for employees, and alleviate what Nimmons referred to as "the most troublesome and costly feature of modern industries, viz. the turnover of labor."

The firm's most important commission came halfway through their existence, when, in 1904, they were awarded one of the largest architectural commissions in Chicago to that date: the Sears, Roebuck and Co. headquarters complex in the North Lawndale area of Chicago, said to be the largest mercantile establishment in the world. The largest building within the complex, the Merchandise Building, was, according to architectural historian H. Allen Brooks, a "straightforward utilitarian



The Sears complex was designed by the architectural firm of Nimmons and Fellows with later additions by George C. Nimmons (above) on his own or in partnership. Four important extant Chicago works by Nimmons are shown on this page; three of the designs have been recognized with Chicago Landmark designation.



Upper stories of the New Franklin Building (in the Printing House Row Chicago Landmark District), 1912, 718-736 S. Dearborn St., George C. Nimmons.



W. M. Hoyt Company Building (in the Cermak Road Bridge District), 1909, 465 W. Cermak Road, Nimmons & Fellows.



ARTHUR DIXON BUILDING

Dixon Building, 1909, 411-15 S. Wells St., Nimmons & Fellows.



Reid, Murdoch and Company Building, designated Chicago Landmark, 1913, 320 N. Clark St., George C. Nimmons.

work with undeniable power in its combination of great size and simple rectangular geometry . . . the heavy rhythm of the unbroken piers adds a measure of richness and dignity to a severely functional design.”

Other commercial buildings attributed to Nimmons & Fellows in Chicago include the Leshar Building at 515-521 S. Franklin St. (1902, demolished), the Stratford Building (location unknown, 1907), the Dixon Building at 411 S. Wells St. (1908), the Washburne Trade School at 3231-3337 W. 31st Street (1909, demolished), and the Railway Terminal and Warehouse Company Building at 444 W. Grand Ave. (1909).

Although best known for their commercial and industrial commissions, Nimmons & Fellows also designed several houses in a variety of popular architectural styles. Residential commissions included the Katharine Rush double house in Hyde Park (1899), the Platt P. Gibbs House also in Kenwood (1904), and the Vernon W. Skiff house in Oak Park (1909). A brick Prairie-influenced mansion for Julius Rosenwald, was said to be the largest house built in Chicago at the time of its construction in 1903; it is a contributing building in the Kenwood Chicago Landmark District.

Following the dissolution of Nimmons & Fellows in 1910, Fellows joined the firm of Hamilton, Fellows & Perkins which became significant during the 1910s and 20s for their many Midwestern school buildings. Nimmons went into solo practice under the firm name of George C. Nimmons & Co. and continued to specialize in commercial and industrial design. He became nationally known for industrial buildings that combined practicality with visual elegance

In 1913-1914, Nimmons designed the Reid Murdoch and Co. Building at 325 N. LaSalle St. Located on a visually-prominent site overlooking the Chicago River, this seven-story building with ten-story clock tower was constructed as an office and warehouse building for a food-processing company. The concrete and steel frame of the building is covered with a massive brick facade. The upper-floor spandrels, entrances and bays are accented by terra-cotta decorations. The building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and was designated a Chicago Landmark in 1976.

Other surviving Chicago works of George C. Nimmons & Co. include the New Franklin Building at 720 South Dearborn Street (1912), which is a contributing building in the Printing House Row Chicago Landmark District, the Pilsen Industrial Center at 2233 S. Throop St. (1926), and the American Furniture Mart at 680 N. Lake Shore Drive (1926). Buildings built elsewhere in the United States include a number of buildings for Sears, including the Sears, Roebuck and Co. Warehouse in Kansas City (1913), the Sears Merchandise Center in Philadelphia (1919), the Sears Building in Atlanta (1925), and the Sears Crosstown Building in Memphis (date not known). Nimmons retired in 1945 as senior partner of Nimmons, Carr & Wright.

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION

According to the Municipal Code of Chicago (Section 2-120-690), the Commission on Chicago Landmarks has the authority to make a final recommendation of landmark designation for an area, district, place, building, structure, work of art or other object within the City of Chicago if the Commission determines it meets two or more of the stated "criteria for designation," as well as possesses sufficient historic integrity to convey its significance.

The following should be considered by the Commission on Chicago Landmarks in determining whether to recommend that the Sears, Roebuck and Co. District be designated as a Chicago Landmark.

Criterion 1: Value as an Example of City, State or National Heritage

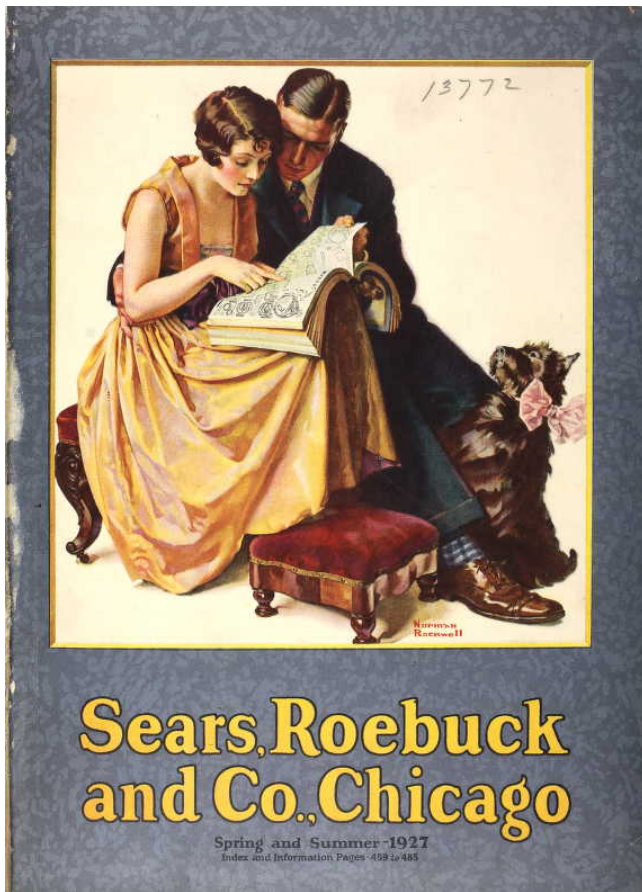
Its value as an example of the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the heritage of the City of Chicago, State of Illinois, or the United States.

- The Sears, Roebuck and Co. District exemplifies the economic and social significance of Sears, Roebuck & Co. to the history of Chicago and the United States. From its completion in 1906 until the company's relocation in 1973, the company's North Lawndale complex served as its worldwide headquarters, housing executive offices, financial and marketing operations, order processing, and product manufacturing and shipping for the country's premier mail-order company. In addition to employing thousands, Sears' popular catalogs and retail stores were iconic symbols of American commerce and consumption in the 20th century. From this massive headquarters on Chicago's West Side, millions of orders were sent across the country by rail and truck over a period of more than 80 years.
- From its founding in the late 19th century up to the 1920s, Sears, Roebuck and Co. became the largest merchandise company in the United States by offering a wide-range of mail-order goods to rural and small-town households, farms and workshops at a time when the majority of the country's population lived in communities with limited local access to consumer goods.
- Beginning in the 1920s, changes in American society, including urbanization as well as increased mobility offered by the automobile, encouraged Sears to augment its mail-order business by opening retail stores throughout the United States. These adaptations preserved the company's position as a major, national economic generator and increased its market share through the Great Depression and beyond.

Criterion 3: Significant Persons

Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social, or other aspect of the development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.

- The Sears, Roebuck and Co. District is associated and identified with the careers of prominent Chicagoans Richard W. Sears, Julius Rosenwald and Robert E. Wood, all of whom made vital contributions to the success of the company and its importance to the history of Chicago and the United States.
- Richard Warren Sears was company president from its founding in 1892 until 1908, when he became chairman of the board, remaining as a director until 1913. He developed his fledgling mail-order watch business into the largest and best-known mail-order company in the world. Sears was an enthusiastic and creative promoter, establishing the iconic Sears mail-order catalog and writing much of the ad copy for early catalogs. He attracted customers with such innovations as merchandise guarantees, competitive prices, return policies, and incentives such as coupons.



Top left: The Spring 1927 Sears catalog featured a cover by famed artist Norman Rockwell. It featured a couple looking for engagement rings, with the banner "Satisfaction Guaranteed or Your Money Back."

Top right: Spring 1930 catalog

Bottom right: Fall 1940 catalog.



- Julius Rosenwald was company president from 1908 until 1928, remaining as chairman of the board until 1932. Rosenwald's managerial and organizational talent allowed the company to rapidly expand during his tenure. The North Lawndale headquarters and mail-order plant that comprises the Sears, Roebuck & Co. District was built by Rosenwald as a much-needed centralization of company functions and operations, laying the groundwork for the company's tremendous retail accomplishments of the 20th century.
- Rosenwald also moved Sears forward through innovative product testing, the manufacturing of Sears-built product lines such as Kenmore appliances and Craftsman tools, and by providing generous benefits and amenities to Sears employees.
- In addition to his success in business, Rosenwald was one of Chicago's leading philanthropists, generously contributing time and money to progressive social causes, especially to programs which sought to improve the quality of life for African Americans. Rosenwald also contributed to the establishment and growth of several of Chicago's major institutions, including the Museum of Science and Industry, Adler Planetarium and the University of Chicago.
- Robert Elkington Wood, who succeeded Rosenwald as company president, led the company through its expansion into "bricks-and-mortar" retailing by opening Sears stores throughout the United States, beginning in the 1920s. This transformation of the company's core business allowed it to expand and prosper in the post-World War II era.

Criterion 4: Exemplary Architecture

Its exemplification of an architectural type or style distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship.

- The Sears, Roebuck and Co. District is a significant example of a large-scale, early 20th-century company headquarters complex, purpose-built for Sears and exemplifying company values and beliefs concerning the importance of planning and aesthetics for the company's operations and public image.
- The district's buildings, including the Administration Building, Printing/Merchandise Development and Laboratory (MDL) Building, Merchandise Building Tower, and Power Plant, are distinguished by high-quality design combining the aesthetics of the Chicago School and Arts-and-Crafts architectural styles. These buildings are finely detailed and are distinguished by handsome craftsmanship in the use of brick, terra cotta, and stone.
- The District's garden, with its Classical-style pergola, survives as an landscaped amenity built as part of the original 1905-1906 complex. It is an unusual Chicago example of a company-created park dedicated to the wellness and enjoyment of urban industrial workers.

Criterion 5: Work of Significant Architect or Designer

Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Chicago, the State of Illinois, or the United States.

- The Sears, Roebuck and Co. District is one of the finest works of George C. Nimmons, working first in partnership with William K. Fellows, then in solo practice. Nimmons was a significant

architect specializing in commercial and industrial buildings that combined Chicago School design principles, including the clear, rational expression of underlying structure, with both traditional and progressive ornamentation, including Classical- and Prairie-style ornament.

- Nimmons and Fellows was well known for progressive designs for large-scale industrial and commercial buildings, and the Sears, Roebuck and Co. North Lawndale headquarters and mail-order plant was one of the firm's most important commissions. Other buildings designed by the firm include the Dixon Building at 411 S. Wells St. (1908), the Washburne Trade School at 3231-3337 W. 31st Street (1909, demolished), and the Railway Terminal and Warehouse Company Building at 444 W. Grand Ave. (1909).
- George C. Nimmons & Co., established following the dissolution of Nimmons & Fellows, designed additions and expansions to buildings in the District, including those for the Administration and MDL buildings. During the 1910s and 20s, Nimmons wrote a series of influential articles on progressive designs for modern industrial buildings for *Architectural Record* and *American Architect*. Notable buildings designed by George C. Nimmons & Co. include the Reid, Murdoch and Company Building at 325 N. LaSalle St. (1914, a designated Chicago Landmark) and the American Furniture Mart (680 N. Lake Shore Dr.) built in phases from 1923 to 1926.

Criterion 6: Distinctive Theme as a District

Its representation of an architectural, cultural, economic, historic, social or other theme expressed through distinctive areas, districts, places, buildings, structures, works of art, or other objects that may or may not be contiguous.

- The Sears, Roebuck and Co. District is a significant complex of office, laboratory, utility and other buildings purpose-built for Sears, one of the most historically-important companies in the history of Chicago and the United States.
- Designed by the same Chicago-based architectural firm and all constructed between 1905 and 1907, the buildings in the District display a distinct overall visual unity based on the use of materials, architectural style and detailing, and served to form a cohesive corporate image that the Sears, Roebuck and Co. actively cultivated in the first decades of the twentieth century.
- The District creates a distinctive and recognizable sense of place within Chicago's larger North Lawndale community area.

Criterion 7: Unique Visual Feature

Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Chicago.

- The buildings of the Sears, Roebuck and Co. District, particularly the 14-story Merchandise Building Tower, possess a striking visual presence along W. Arthington St. and S. Homan Ave. and are strong visual "landmarks" in the North Lawndale neighborhood.

Integrity Criteria

The integrity of the proposed landmark must be preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship and ability to express its historic community, architecture or aesthetic value.

The Sears, Roebuck and Co. District is a rare intact group of early twentieth-century corporate campus architecture. The District's streetscapes, as well as its five original Sears company structures, illustrate the function of a large mail-order plant as well as Sears' desire to create a campus which would reflect the company's position as a leading American merchant. The complex's sunken garden conveys the company's progressive efforts to create a pleasant working environment for its employees. In general the structures retain almost all of their historic exterior features, including their overall form and footprint, historic design, historic arrangement of entrances and windows, and historic decorative detailing, including stone columns and terra-cotta cornices, friezes, medallions, and belt courses.

The Administration Building, with its intact overall form and footprint, ornate exterior decorative work, historic wood double-hung windows, and intact interior spaces exhibits excellent historic integrity. In 1917 there was a small service building added to the south, rear elevation, consisting of basement and first floor levels. Other exterior changes include alterations to the building's east and west (secondary) entrances and the removal of some terra-cotta detailing and the original parapet above the north (main) entrance. The building's main lobby, entered from the north entrance, retains a geometric-patterned marble floor, ornamental cornice, and decorative wall moldings. A staircase leading up half a flight from the lobby to the first-floor main corridor has an ornamental metal railing. Secondary interior staircases also retain original iron railings and posts. Other interior spaces, including executive and clerical offices and support spaces, have been extensively remodeled over the years.

At the MDL Building, several additions were added early in the building's history, and these should be regarded as historically significant as illustrative of the company's rapid growth. Additions include a four-story annex (1909-1912) of reinforced concrete and steel construction near the south end of the west elevation; an additional two stories constructed on the 1905 portion of the building (1916); a small one-story addition built on the south elevation of the annex (mid-1910s); and a two-story loading dock erected on the south elevation of the annex (mid-1910s). The exterior of the MDL Building retains a unified design despite the large additions made to the original structure.

Also at the MDL Building, most of the original windows were replaced around 1980-90. Window replacement is a common alteration and does not compromise the fenestration pattern on any elevation. Additionally, many sashes had been lost, resulting in the installation of plywood panels to secure the facility. At an unknown time, a handful of window openings were bricked-in; the infill is recessed in all openings, however, allowing the window openings to continue to read as such.

Two elevated covered walkways were constructed in the 1960s, connecting the MDL Building to the Administration Building as well as to the Allstate Insurance Building, which was built in 1948. These are not considered significant features for the purpose of this designation.

Though the larger Merchandise Building is no longer extant, the surviving Merchandise Building Tower retains its original form and footprint, exterior masonry cladding, regular fenestration pattern, and ornate upper-level terra cotta work and tile roof. The Tower retains its historic associations with Sears, Roebuck, and Co. and remains the complex's primary visual element.

The Power House retains its overall form and footprint as well as its 250-foot tall chimney, its exterior brick, stone, and terra cotta masonry, its large interior engine room, and examples of its original electric generator equipment.

The sunken garden retains its Classical-inspired pergola, concrete planting urns, and overall formal garden layout and is the last remaining outdoor amenity that survives within the original Sears complex.

Despite changes to and partial demolition of the vast complex, the Sears, Roebuck and Co. District retains the ability to express its historic, community, architectural, and aesthetic values as a corporate complex purpose-built for Sears, Roebuck & Co., historically one of Chicago's most important companies and a nationally-important giant in the history of retailing. The District's buildings and garden with pergola form a handsome and well-crafted ensemble that was the design of George C. Nimmons (working first in partnership with William K. Fellows, then in solo practice), who was a significant architect in the context of Chicago, specializing in large-scale industrial and commercial buildings. The District's historic integrity is preserved in light of its location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, and ability to express such values.

SIGNIFICANT HISTORICAL AND ARCHITECTURAL FEATURES

Whenever a building, structure, object, or district is under consideration for landmark designation, the Commission on Chicago Landmarks is required to identify the "significant historical and architectural features" of the property. This is done to enable the owners and the public to understand which elements are considered most important to preserve the historical and architectural character of the proposed landmark.

Based upon its evaluation of the Sears, Roebuck and Co. District, the Commission recommends that the significant features be identified as follows:

- All exterior elevations, including rooflines, of the district's buildings visible from public rights-of-way; and
- The park commonly known as the "sunken garden," and pergola extending along the north side of W. Arthington Street.



A circa 1920s post card published by Sears that invited tourists to visit the mail-order complex.

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Illustrations

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