G-I-C-042

Sears & Roebuck House
Barton
Private 1917

The Sears & Roebuck House was assembled in 1917 by the great-great-grandfather of the present occupant, Lee Russell. It is a good example of the mail-order house of which there are few, if any other examples found in Garrett County.

It is a 1½ story, 3 bay by 2 bay house with a 2 story ell. The house rests on a stone with concrete foundation, has weatherboard siding with corner boards, a beveled water table and wooden belt courses. The gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles, has exposed rafter ends and jig-sawn corner brackets.

The facade faces North and has a 1-story, 1 bay projected central entrance with a gable portico supported by 4 wooden chamfered posts with ornate, jig-sawn, open-work brackets and trim.

MARYLAND HISTORICAL TRUST

G-I-C-042
MAGI ~~#120170563S~~
G

INVENTORY FORM FOR STATE HISTORIC SITES SURVEY 120170575

1 NAME

HISTORIC

AND/OR COMMON
Sears & Roebuck House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
Michael Rd., approximately 1.5 mi. W of Barton

CITY, TOWN
Barton

X VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
6th

STATE
Maryland

COUNTY
Garrett County

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	__PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	X AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	X PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	X PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	__YES: RESTRICTED	__GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		X NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME
Lee Russell

Telephone #: (301) 463-2843

STREET & NUMBER
2 Watercliffe St.

CITY, TOWN
Lonaconing

__ VICINITY OF

STATE, zip code
Maryland 21539

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

Liber #: 175
Folio #: 113

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
Garrett County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER
Third and Alder Streets

CITY, TOWN
Oakland

STATE
Maryland 21550

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE
None

DATE

__FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

G-I-C-042

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
_EXCELLENT	_DETERIORATED	X UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
X GOOD	_RUINS	_ALTERED	_MOVED DATE_____
_FAIR	_UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Sears & Roebuck House is located on the S side of Michael Rd. approximately 1.5 miles W of Barton. It is a one and a half story, three bay by two bay house with a two story ell. The house rests on a stone and concrete foundation, has weatherboard siding with cornerboards, a beveled water table and wooden belt courses. The gable roof is covered with asphalt shingles, has exposed rafter ends and jig-sawn corner brackets. There are jig-sawn, open-work, pedimentad panels, supported by brackets, in all gable end peaks.

The facade faces N and has a one story, one bay projected central entrance with a gable portico supported by four wooden chamfered posts with ornate, jig-sawn, open-work brackets and trim. There is a balustrade of wooden cross pieces. The floor under the portico entrance is poured concrete. The facade entrance is a wooden paneled door with a rectangular two pane transom.

There is a gable dormer with double windows above the facade portico. It has corner brackets and a jig-sawn, open-work pedimentad panel supported by brackets in its gable end, as in the other gable end peaks.

The windows are aluminum one over one sash with plain board surrounds. There ar- wooden vertical and x-bracings under the facade and E elevation windows.

There is a partially enclosed one story shed porch on the E elevation. The enclosed section runs along the ell and rests on a cinder block foundation. An entrance is on the N elevation of the porch. The open porch continues along the E gable end and is supported with two plain square wooden posts. There is a small gable dormer with a trefoil window on the E slope of the ell roof.

There are two interior brick chimneys: 1 on the ell gable end and one on the main gable.

There are four frame outbuildings SE of the house. There are three frame outbuildings, including a corn crib, machine shed and tool shed and a frame bank barn across Michael Road, N of the house.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

G-I-C-042

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
_PREHISTORIC	_ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	_COMMUNITY PLANNING	_LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	_RELIGION	
_1400-1499	_ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	_CONSERVATION	_LAW	_SCIENCE	
_1500-1599	X AGRICULTURE	_ECONOMICS	_LITERATURE	_SCULPTURE	
_1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	_EDUCATION	_MILITARY	_SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
_1700-1799	_ART	_ENGINEERING	_MUSIC	_THEATER	
_1800-1899	_COMMERCE	_EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	_PHILOSOPHY	_TRANSPORTATION	
X 1900-	_COMMUNICATIONS	_INDUSTRY	_POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	_OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		_INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES 1917 BUILDER/ARCHITECT Sears & Roebuck

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Sears & Roebuck House was assembled in 1917 by the great-great-grandfather of the present occupant, Lee Russell. It is a good example of the mail-order house of which there are few, if any other examples found in Garrett County.

Lee Russell's great-great-grandfather was a miner and a farmer. His Sears house was delivered to nearby Barton by train (interview with Lee Russell).

The Sears Roebuck & Co. of Chicago, Ill. sold and financed nearly 100,000 mail-order houses from 1909-1937. Numerous sales offices sprang up east of the Mississippi River, with a large branch office in Philadelphia. Sears houses turned-up in the most remote places; anywhere there was a rail line. A prospective buyer could choose from several models pictured in Sears' Book of Modern Homes. Materials sent, once the order and a modest down payment was made, included: lumber, lath, shingles, doors with beveled French glass, molding, building paper, windows, oak floors, hardware, nails, eaves, downspouts, and enough paint and varnish for 4 coats. (Halpin, pp. 27-28).

According to Lee Russell, this Sears house came with the stair rail and newel post.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

G-I-C-042

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Halpin, Kay. "Sears, Roebuck's Best-kept Secret," Historic Preservation. September - October, 1981.

Russell, Lee. Interview, October 10, 1980.

CONTINUE ON SEPARATE SHEET IF NECESSARY

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY _____

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	COUNTY
STATE	COUNTY

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE
Donna Ware, Historic Site Surveyor

ORGANIZATION
Maryland Historical Trust/Bureau of Mines

DATE
March 1981

STREET & NUMBER
Shaw House, 21 State Circle

TELEPHONE
301-269-2438

CITY OR TOWN
Annapolis

STATE
Maryland 21401

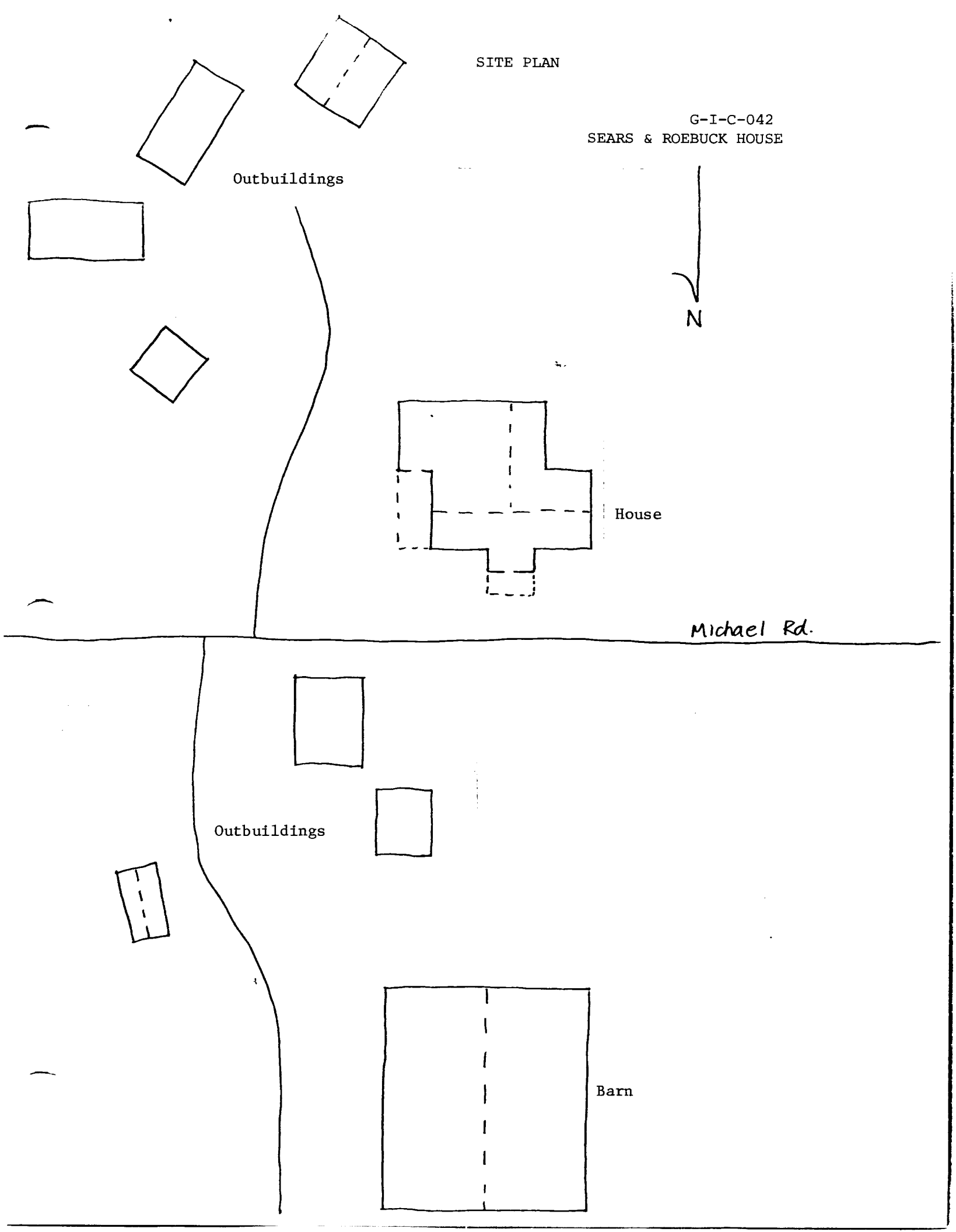
The Maryland Historic Sites Inventory was officially created by an Act of the Maryland Legislature, to be found in the Annotated Code of Maryland, Article 41, Section 181 KA, 1974 Supplement.

The Survey and Inventory are being prepared for information and record purposes only and do not constitute any infringement of individual property rights.

RETURN TO: Maryland Historical Trust
The Shaw House, 21 State Circle
Annapolis, Maryland 21401
(301) 267-1438

SITE PLAN

G-I-C-042
SEARS & ROEBUCK HOUSE



G-I-C-042

One Order Brings It All

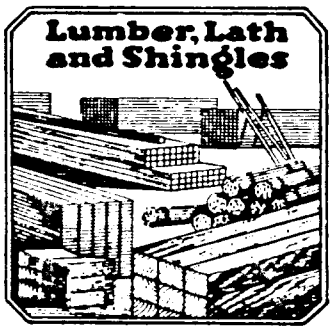
WHEN YOU PURCHASE A HOUSE FROM SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO.

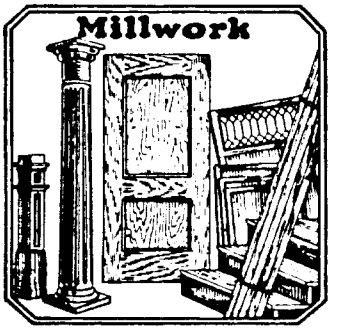
You dispose of the entire transaction in a few minutes. You select your house from our Book of "Honor Bilt" Modern Homes, merely writing down the name or number, and on receipt of your order we ship at the prices quoted.

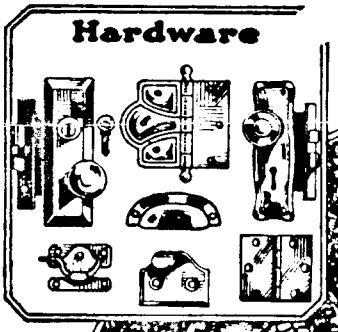
THE LUMBER,
LATH AND
SHINGLES;
MILL WORK, SUCH AS
DOORS,
WINDOWS,
MOLDING,
BUILDING PAPER,
FLOORING,
PORCH MATERIAL, ETC.;
HARDWARE,
NAILS,
EAVES TROUGH,
DOWN SPOUT,
PAINT
AND VARNISH

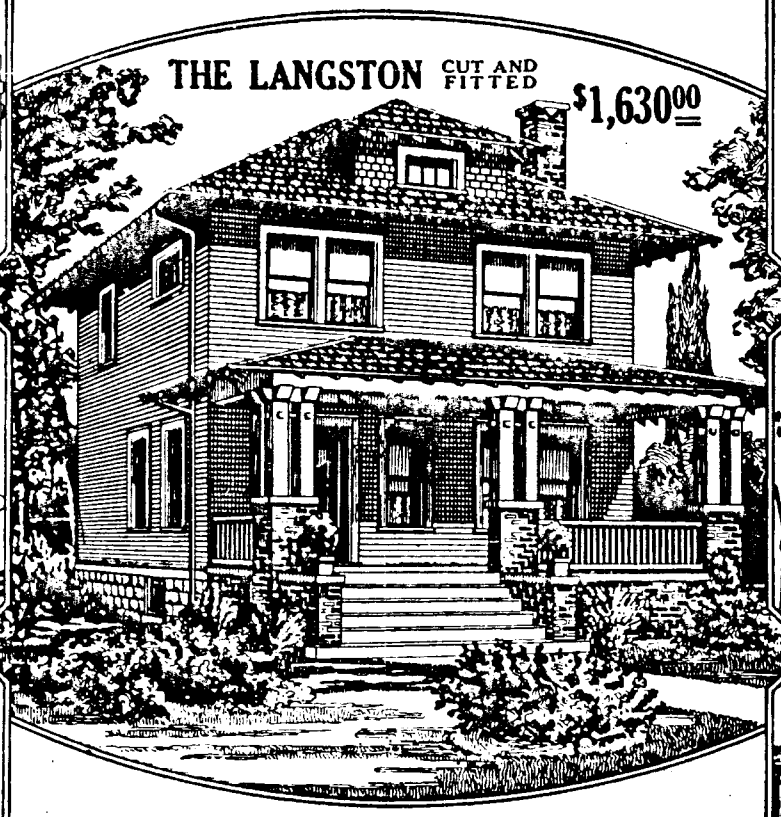
At Your Option: Steam Heating, Furnace Heating, Plumbing Outfit, Electric Wiring, Gas and Electric Fixtures, Wall Paper and Electric Lighting Plants Furnished Extra.

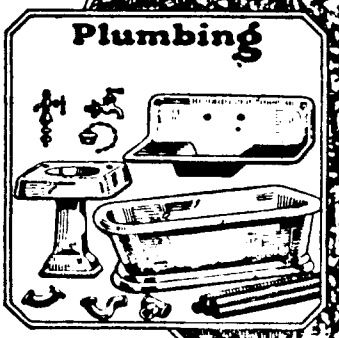
See how much more convenient this is than to be compelled to go to a dozen places for as many different items, each transaction requiring time, expense and worry.

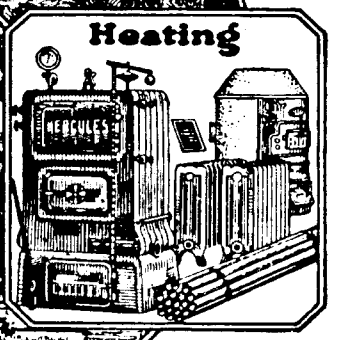


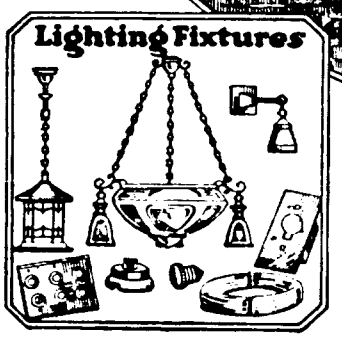






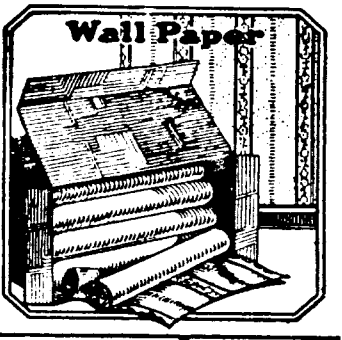






In addition to saving you time and worry in selecting, pricing, etc., you can be sure when you send us your order for a Modern Home that you will make a considerable saving. Thousands of our customers who have built houses according to our plans and with our materials in almost every state of the Union have proved this to their own satisfaction.

You can even go further and benefit yourself still more by including in your order not only all of the materials for your Modern Home as illustrated on this page, but by adding to your order to be shipped when convenient to you, your **rugs, furniture,** perhaps **a piano, a Silvertone phonograph, chinaware, silverware, suits, dresses, linen, etc.,** all of which you will find illustrated, described and priced in this catalog.



Doesn't it seem reasonable to you that because we very much desire all of your patronage year in and year out, we should be very particular when selling you a Modern Home to give you **the best that money can buy for this purpose?** A large number of our customers deal with us regularly for their everyday needs because of the splendid material we gave them for their Modern Homes and the substantial savings our prices enabled them to make.

Look over the houses illustrated and priced on the inside back cover of this book—our big General Catalog No. 139. Note the prices for all of the material **"Already Cut" and Fitted,** then sit down and write us a letter or use the post card opposite page 888 for our beautifully illustrated new Book of "Honor Bilt" Modern Homes, which will be mailed to you postpaid on request.

G-1-C-042

Sears, Roebuck's Best-kept Secret

BY KAY HALPIN

From gabled mansions to humble cottages, tens of thousands of American houses arrived precut straight out of mail-order catalogs

When Neil and Catherine McDonald of McLean, Va., went searching for an old house to restore, they wanted one that would give them and their children a link with America's past. What they found linked them with the past—but a much different past than they had expected.

The McDonalds discovered that the two-story, cypress-shingled house they had found was right out of the pages of the 1926 Sears, Roebuck catalog. It was called The Fullerton, and its six rooms and big front porch came precut, numbered and ready to be assembled, all for $2,294.

The original owners, Francis and Bessie Allen, hired a team of horses and a scoop and dug the basement. Then they set to work matching the numbered pieces to the plans, finishing in the fall of 1927. "What a happy day that was," recalled Mrs. Allen. "I fixed a big chicken dinner for everyone." The Allens and their children lived in the house for 50 years, until Mr. Allen's death. "We'd be there still," says Mrs. Allen, who is 93, "if Frank were alive."

The McDonalds quickly sensed that the house was a rare piece of Americana, a symbol of bygone days when Americans shopped by mail for everything from bunion protectors to grand pianos.

They also learned that their dream was about to go up in smoke, literally, to be replaced by a new symbol of American life, a racquetball club. But the determined McDonalds made their dream come true. They found a new site, dug a basement—this time with bulldozers and a hydraulic scoop—and had the house moved.

"It is really a small monument to the working class that kept America going during the Depression," says Catherine McDonald. "And even if it isn't yet considered historic, when the time comes, it will be here." At any rate, says Mrs. McDonald with satisfaction, the house has recently been added to the McLean Women's Club annual Unusual House Tour.

What the McDonalds saved was indeed a symbol of a bygone era. But

Max Hirshfeld

Persuasive catalog ads (opposite) attracted thousands of Americans to mail-order houses between 1909 and 1937.

After they found this house in McLean, Va., Neil and Catherine McDonald (above) discovered that it was The Fullerton, a 1926 model. They moved the house to prevent its demolition.

G-I-C-042

Kay Ha.

Catherine McDonald restored the original heart-of-pine woodwork and trim in the living room and dining room (below).

Built in the 1920s, The Lexington (right) is part of a Sears enclave in McLean, Va. Developer Francis Walter sold quarter-acre lots to prospective buyers, then constructed Sears houses to order.

Max Hirshh.

G-I-C-042

rare? Not necessarily, says Katherine Cole, chief of the Division of Cultural Programs in the National Park Service's Rocky Mountain Region. If they are rare, says Cole, a fan and student of Sears houses, it is because "people in preservation don't know that they exist." Cole herself only discovered them about two and a half years ago. "I got into it because I was asked about them by someone doing a survey, and I really knew nothing about them. I went to the Library of Congress, and they had very little. So I began researching on my own."

Cole says they have great significance for preservationists, particularly those involved in cultural resources surveys. "When you're out doing a survey of a local district, you're inevitably going to make judgments about the development of architecture in the area, based on the characteristics of the buildings that you see.

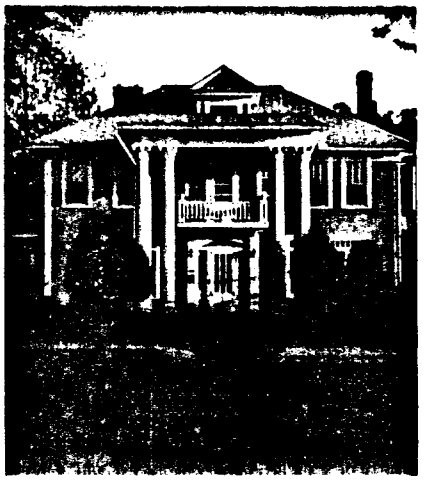
"Let's say you come across what you suppose is just another bungalow. Sears bungalows came direct to the door, and no local architect was involved. But obviously they didn't say 'Sears' on them, so how would you know that they weren't designed locally? The problem for preservationists is that they often think that what they see was designed locally. That may be a big mistake."

And across the country, there are thousands of opportunities for error. Sears sold and financed nearly 100,000 mail-order houses from 1909 to 1937. The company even opened sales offices in many cities from the Mississippi to the Atlantic and a large branch office in Philadelphia.

"Sears houses are a fascinating phenomenon," says Cole. "They turn up in places as remote as Wyoming in the early 1900s; imagine, you could be just as up-to-date as people in Chicago."

Sears houses are found anywhere there was a rail line—places like Sedgwick, Kan., Sweet Spring, Mo., Ossining, N.Y., Evansville, Ind., Burton View, Ill., and Greeley, Colo. Because there are so many of them, as well as mail-order models made by other firms, including Montgomery Ward and Alladin, Cole says it is important that preservationists become aware of them because of the questions they raise about architectural significance.

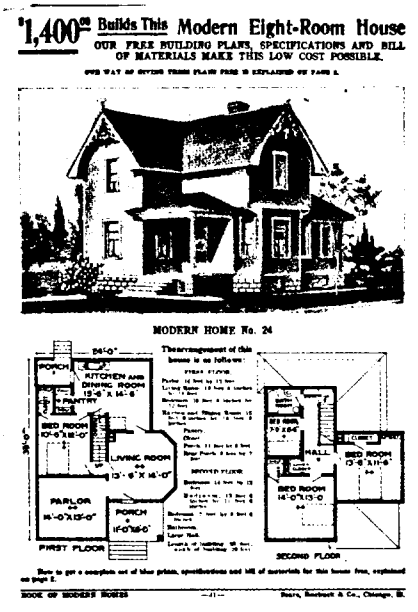
"If you're concerned about preserving a Sears house, and there are many others in the neighborhood," she says, "the decision whether it should be preserved or not inevitably will be affected."



Kay Halpin, above and below

"A home for the discriminating buyer," The Magnolia (left) sold for $5,140 in 1918. Sears's largest and most expensive house, it featured Gothic columns (below), French doors, 9-foot ceilings, servants' quarters and a solarium.

Sears houses generally were designed with many small rooms, a disadvantage for contemporary families.



But for the McDonalds, and for thousands of other Americans in today's tight housing market, preserving mail-order houses is as much an economic decision as it is a preservation decision or an emotional one. At about the same time that the McDonalds were replacing the original cypress shingles on their Sears house and bringing its kitchen cabinets back to their original soft pine luster, Mrs. Eunice Rollins of Ridgewood, Ohio, was making the winning auction bid on an old southern-style mansion complete with Gothic columns and servants' quarters.

Later, while her daughter and son-in-law were helping to strip away the years of paint and varnish, they be-

Kay Halp

Hirshfeld

G-I-C-042

came intrigued by persistent rumors about the house. With help from Sharon D'Atri of the Ridgewood Preservation Society, they confirmed the rumors. The huge house, too, had been purchased from Sears, Roebuck.

In the Sears catalog of 1918 it was called The Magnolia, and it was one of the largest and most expensive precut houses that Sears ever offered, with gracious curving staircase, inlaid floors and six massive columns. It sold for $5,140. The catalog's glowing praise matched the size and beauty of the house: "From the days of George Washington to the present time this Colonial type of residence has housed the greatest figures in American history, science and literature. Many will recognize its close resemblance to the famous residence in Cambridge, Mass., where poet Longfellow composed his immortal works. Leading architectural authorities declare this type will continue to win favor for hundreds of years."

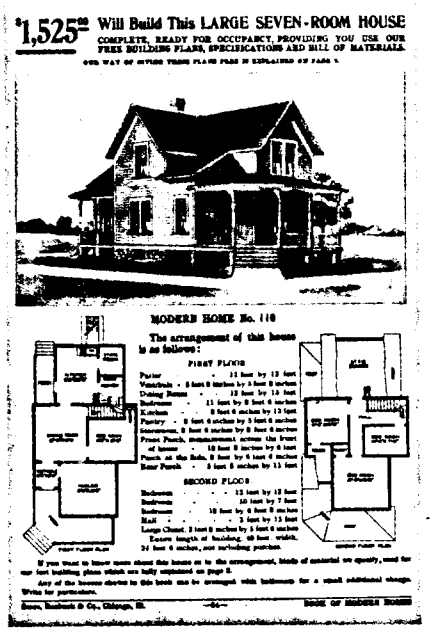
Despite the intricate design and large size of many models, Sears made construction sound quite simple, even for the amateur. One merely chose the desired model from the captivating names and descriptions in the *Modern Homes Catalog*, sent in an order along with a modest down payment, and soon materials began to arrive. Shipments included lumber, lath, shingles, doors with beveled French glass, molding, building paper, windows, oak floors, hardware, nails, eaves, downspouts and enough paint and varnish for four coats.

Along with the first batch of materials received in 1926 by W. E. Graves of Washington, D.C., came detailed instructions for building his two-bedroom model, The Crescent. To do the roofing, they admonished: "The roof boards for your Modern Home are to be laid tight. The Oriental Slate Surfaced Shingles are to be laid ½ inch apart and 4 inches to the weather. Enough wood shingles are furnished to be laid for first course projecting over eaves. Over the wood shingles lay your first course of slate-surface shingles. This will prevent the first course of slate shingles from drooping at the eaves."

"Remember," homeowners were warned, "these instructions and plans are the result of several years of practical experience. Follow them carefully and no trouble will result. If you do not follow them, errors will occur."

Graves followed his instructions carefully. His eaves didn't droop, nor did trouble occur. In fact, three generations of Graveses have lived in the house for more than 50 years.

In a nation that seemed to produce merchandising geniuses by the gross, mail-order housing was one of the most creative do-it-yourself retailing schemes ever conceived. But coming up with the unusual was, by the turn of the century, a trademark of Richard


$1,525 Will Build This LARGE SEVEN-ROOM HOUSE

COMPLETE, READY FOR OCCUPANCY, PROVIDING YOU USE OUR FREE BUILDING PLANS, SPECIFICATIONS AND BILL OF MATERIALS

MODERN HOME No. 110

The arrangement of this house is as follows:

FIRST FLOOR

SECOND FLOOR

Sears, who had been trading and selling things since he was a boy. At the age of 19 he was a freight clerk on the Minneapolis & St. Louis Railway at North Redwood, Minn. As he handled cargo, he picked up tips on mark-ups, copy and especially advertising.

One day, when a shipment of watches was left unclaimed at the depot, young Sears wrote to the watch company. They agreed to let him have them for $12 apiece. He promptly resold them to other agents down the line for $14. Orders began to pour in for more, and in 1886 Sears opened his own watch company in Minneapolis. Later, as repair requests began to pile up, he hired a young watch repairman named Alvah Roebuck, and the great merchandising venture that was to profoundly affect the buying habits of rural and small-town America was launched.

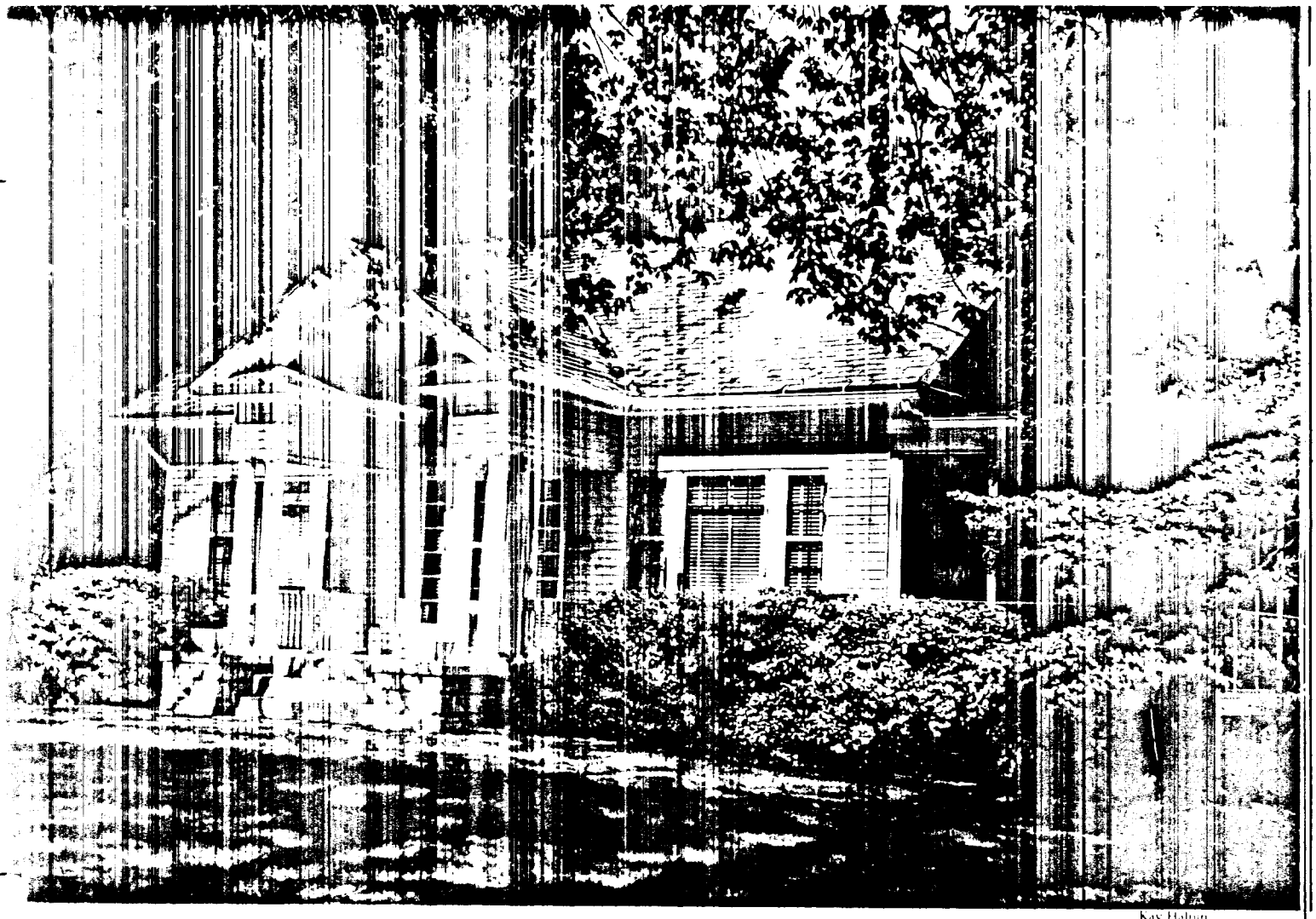
Convincing customers that they could buy and build a house through the mail took an uncanny knack for writing advertising copy. But Richard Sears was a word merchant almost without equal. His glowing epitaphs, appealing pictures, testimonials and even a gilt-edged guarantee fairly leaped off the page. He appealed to every type of buyer and on every level.

Copywriters trained by Sears continued his tradition. To the churchgoer they urged, "to get the most out of life as Our Creator intended it to be, A HOME OF YOUR OWN IS AN ABSOLUTE NECESSITY." To the budget conscious they promised, "in the end you will have a beautiful home instead of rent receipts." To the family man they chided, "give the kiddies a chance." To the lonely they offered "real friends and neighbors" and to the middle-aged, security in old age. Should all else fail to move the customer, Sears added a free set of plans, the advice of architects, builders and contractors and the backing of a business worth $100 million.

To help cut the costs, especially of financing, the company built a sash and door factory in Norwood, Ohio, and millwork plants at Cairo, Ill., and Port Newark, N.J. By 1928 the *Honor Built Modern Homes Catalog* offered nearly 100 different types and styles of houses. Some were two-bedroom stucco, others six-room, two-story structures with wide front porches and sun decks. Still others included such extras as electric fixtures instead of gas, built-in ironing boards, wall safes in the master-bedroom closet, storm windows and pipeless furnaces. Later, garages were added when the horseless carriage seemed to be catching on.

Since the entire venture was conceived to stimulate the lagging sales of certain home furnishings, all floor plans were marked with the exact spot where a Sears, Roebuck piano or sofa would enhance a room. Illustrations of complete interiors were included with each home advertisement. They noted what good taste the lady of the house would show by choosing certain bedroom suites or china cabinets. For The Ashmore model, the catalog points out, "The dining room as shown, when lighted in subdued effects, will present a most cheerful appearance."

Sales of Sears houses and their furnishings peaked between 1926 and 1929, but perhaps the greatest triumph of the industry took place in 1919, when Standard Oil of Indiana sent Sears, Roebuck a check for $1 million and an order for 200 houses. Standard had bought two coal mines near Carlinville, Ill., and had hired the men to



Kay Halpin

work them. Suddenly, they needed inexpensive housing for the miners and their families, and precut Modern Homes were the answer.

Sears, Roebuck filled the order and two small towns were born, Standard City and Standard Addition. The oil company sold the houses to the men for $100 down and $40 per month. The mines, however, petered out in 1923, and the miners left. Some of the houses have been refurbished and are in use today.

"Sears was doing what architects have always dreamed of doing—design the whole world," says the Park Service's Katherine Cole. "They planned the entire town, right down to the sidewalks and the sizes of the workers' and supervisors' houses. They were apparently very aware of the pecking order in company towns."

Though mail-order house sales went well, it was the financing that eventually led to their demise. The Depression put Sears in the awkward position of foreclosing on the very families that the company had struggled so hard to win over to catalog buying.

Three generations of the W. E. Graves family have lived in this Washington, D.C., model of The Crescent (above).

Modern Home No. 110 (opposite) came without a bathroom, but one could be arranged "for a small additional charge."

But Richard Sears' promises, though extravagant and colorful, had not been without foundation. The quality of the materials has meant survival for countless thousands of the old houses. "I was surprised by many of the extras," says John Reitschel, a Washington, D.C., builder who is restoring an Honor Bilt Home. "All the inner walls are double plated. That's something you just don't see anymore."

Cole predicts that in the future more Sears houses will surface as preservationists become aware of them and able to identify them. Toward that end she's working on a guide to Sears houses by roof type that will eliminate the need to flip through catalogs to spot pictures of the houses.

Sears archivist Lenore Swoiskin, at the Sears Tower in Chicago, is also actively trying to identify Sears houses—and to collect the rare catalogs. Extant houses she's uncovered include the dean of students' house at Davidson College, in North Carolina, and a 10-room mansion built in the 1920s that is now the Heil Funeral Home in Angola, N.Y.

The problem of identifying Sears houses is compounded, Cole says, by new owners who often try to hide the fact that they live in a Sears house. But to original owners like Col. and Mrs. Beverly Carter of McLean, Va., there's nothing but pride. The Carters even gave their house a big birthday party when it turned 50 in 1979.

"My husband and I ordered this house in the summer of 1929, and we had a local carpenter build it. We moved in that fall. The carpenter said that it was made of the finest materials that could be found anywhere. The design has such charm that strangers often stop by to remark about it." **HP**

Kay Halpin is a free-lance writer in Washington, D.C.

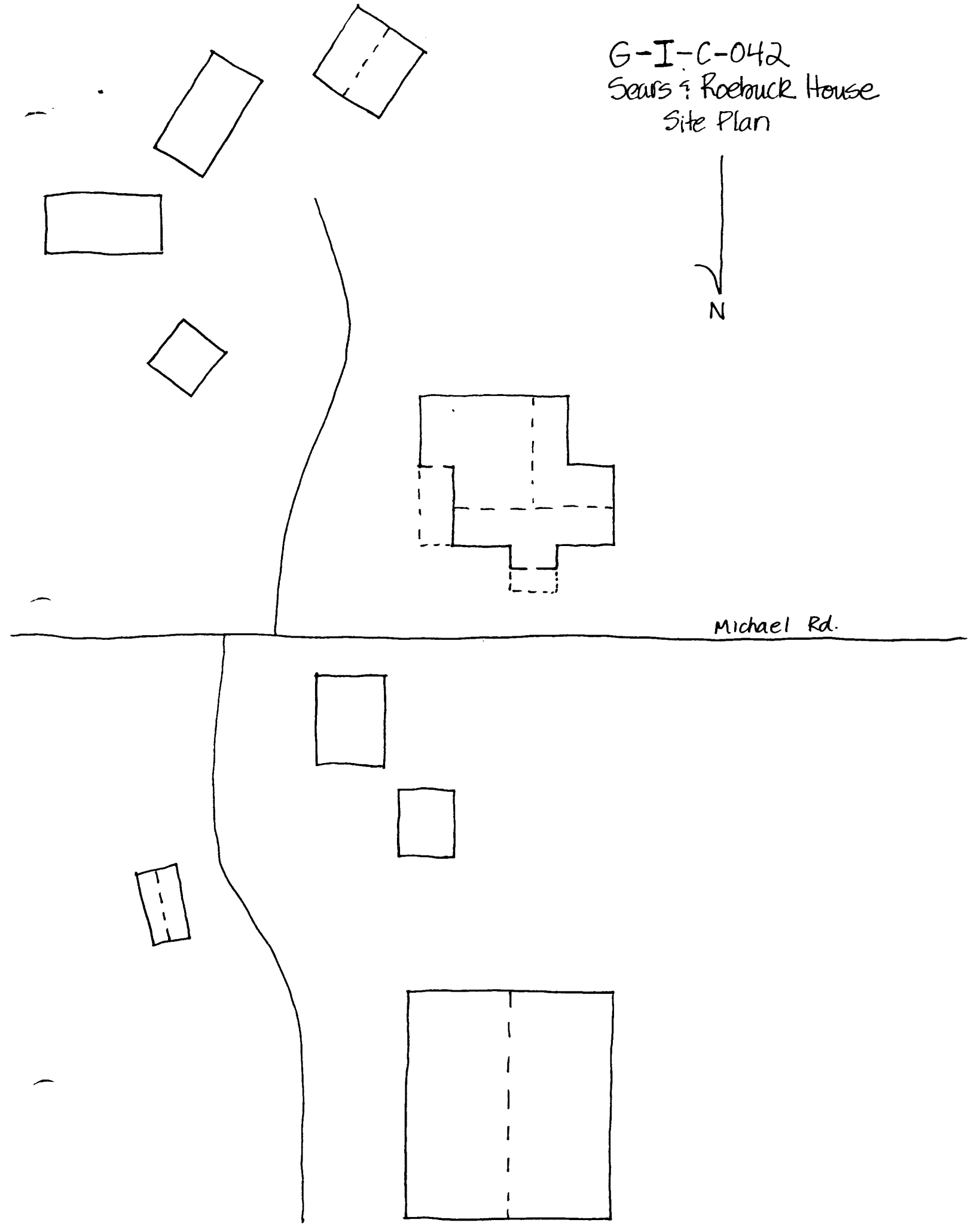
G-I-C-042

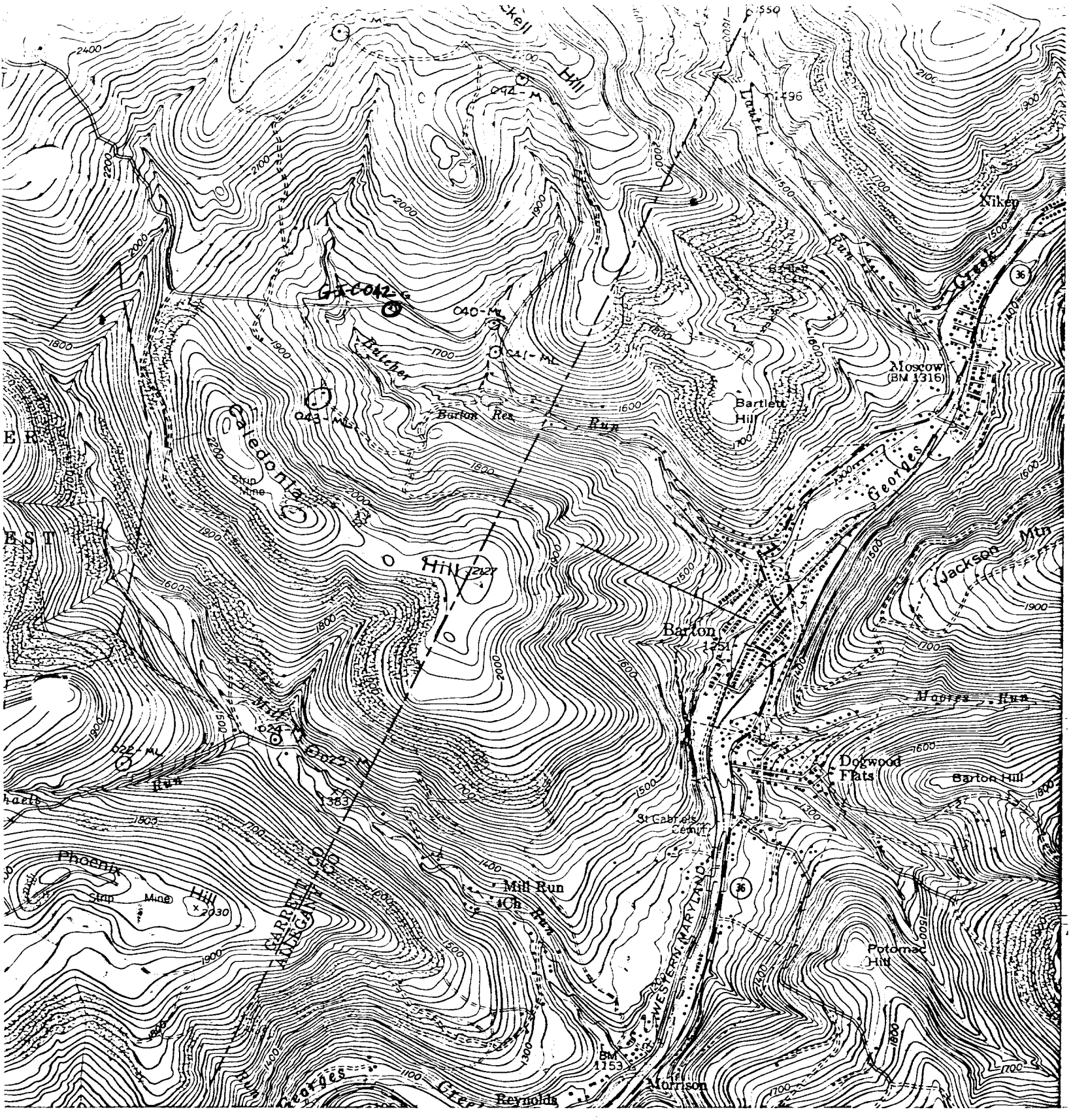
gang:

for your edification

RLA

G-I-C-042
Sears & Roebuck House
Site Plan





Barton : MD/WV
7.5 Minute Series
Scale 1:24,000
1948; photorevised 1974

Site #: G-I-C-042
Sears & Roebuck House
Michael Rd., approximately 1.5 mile
west of Barton

G-I-C-042
Sears & Roebuck House
Garrett Co., MD
Valerie Cesna 10/10/80
Facade: N elev.

G-I-C-042
Sears & Roebuck House
Garrett Co., MD
Valerie Cesna 10/10/80
Facade: N elev.

G-I-C-042
Sears & Roebuck House
Garrett Co., MD
Valerie Cesna 10/10/80
Rear: W & S gable ends