

Kit Homes: A History

In the early 20th century, more than 400,000 kit homes were constructed across the United States. Consumers could select the style, upgrades, and extras all from a mail order catalog. These homes arrived as pre-cut materials, shipped in sections ready to be bolted together. The purchase price typically included blueprints, step-by-step instructions, and most necessary components—right down to the nails. Most of the kit homes offered heating, indoor plumbing, and electricity, amenities that were not common in homes at the time.

A standard kit contained between 10,000 and 30,000 parts, delivered by railroad boxcar. Manufacturers claimed that pre-cut homes could save builders up to 30% compared to traditional construction methods. Homes were advertised that they could be constructed in as little as 90 days.

The concept of mail-order homes quickly gained popularity, leading to the rise of several kit home companies. Most of these manufacturers were based in the Midwest, likely due to the region's proximity to major rail lines and abundant lumber supplies.



Identifying Kit Homes

Please note that unless otherwise stated, the identification of the homes in this brochure is based on best guesses. Kit home manufacturers copied popular housing styles and regularly borrowed from plans and designs from architects and other companies. A kit home cannot be determined by appearance or floor plan alone.

We contacted a kit-home expert for some of these identifications.

Map of Kit Homes in Hudson



1	145 E. Streetsboro	Sears	8	26 Baldwin	Sears
2	18 Roslyn	Sears	9	85 Hudson	Sears
3	23 Roslyn	Sears	10	91 Hudson	Sears
4	24 Roslyn	Gunnison	11	7383 Darrow	Aladdin
5	147 Elm	Lustron	12	230 W. Streetsboro	Gunnison
6	37 Division	Sears	13	234 W. Streetsboro	Gunnison
7	16 Baldwin	Gordon Van-Tine	14	154 S. Main	Standard

Sears, Roebuck & Co.

Chicago-based Sears, Roebuck and Company was the most well-known manufacturer of kit homes, selling between 70,000-75,000 homes from 1908-1940. The first catalog devoted exclusively to mail-order homes was issued in 1908 featuring 22 home styles priced between \$650-\$2,500. By 1940, Sears offered over 400 different styles.

In the early Sears catalogs, home styles were identified with a number. Starting in the 1918 catalog, Sears assigned names to differentiate the home styles. Examples include a Tudor style, called the Elmhurst, a two-story English cottage called the Willard, and a Dutch colonial named the Rembrandt.

Sears was one of the first manufacturers to offer financing for almost all building materials and even labor and land. Typical loans lasted from 5-15 years at 6-7% interest.

Like other manufacturers, Sears was greatly affected by the Great Depression and had to shutter its homes department. The last Modern Homes catalog was produced in 1940.

Most of these homes have been officially listed in the National Database for Sears Catalog Homes, however, not all have been authenticated as official Sears homes.



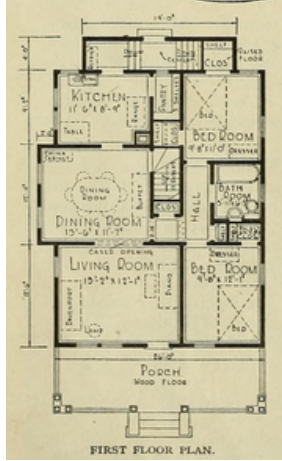
MODERN HOMES

Sears, Roebuck *and* Co.

CHICAGO - NEWARK

18 ROSLYN STREET

Vallonia



Documentation confirms that 18 Roslyn is an official Sears Vallonia. William J. (1866–1952) and Alda B. Greenlese (1867–1926) secured a loan through on March 20, 1924 for \$3,500, and likely built the home shortly thereafter.

The Vallonia, a Craftsman bungalow, was one of the most popular Sears styles. The Vallonia first appeared in the Sears catalog in 1910 and was listed in every issue until the last in 1940.

23 ROSLYN STREET

Conway



In 1924, soon after building 18 Roslyn, William and Alda Greenlese, sold land across the street to George (1898–1986) and Alice Gott (1894–1977). The Gotts built this bungalow, believed to be a Sears Conway model.

85 HUDSON STREET

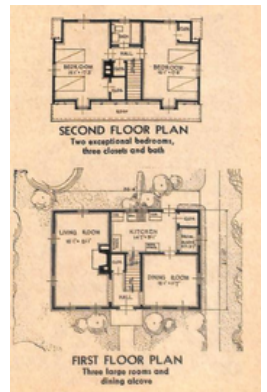
Haverhill



In the mid-1930s, Western Reserve Academy built these two Sears kit homes, the Colonial-style "Haverhill" and the Cape-Cod style "Milford" likely to be used as faculty housing.

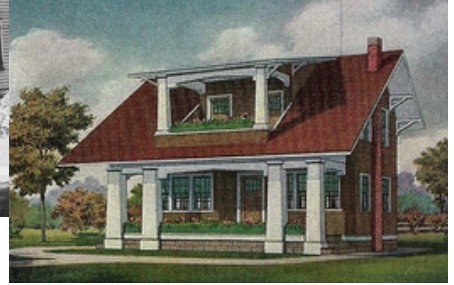
91 HUDSON STREET

Milford



26 BALDWIN STREET

Elmwood



The Sears Elmwood, a Craftsman-style bungalow, was built by Gustavus "Gus" and Martha "Mattie" Jenkins around 1914. The Elmwood, first introduced in 1911, featured an open sleeping balcony on the second floor. Before the advent of central air conditioning, homeowners slept on these balconies during summer months to keep cool. In 1922, Sears redesigned the Elmwood, enclosing the porch, and renaming the style the Sunbeam. Since 26 Baldwin was built before 1922, the sleeping balcony was likely enclosed at a later point in time.



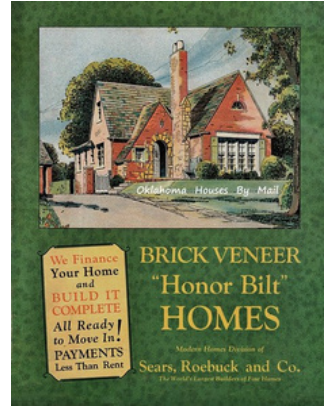
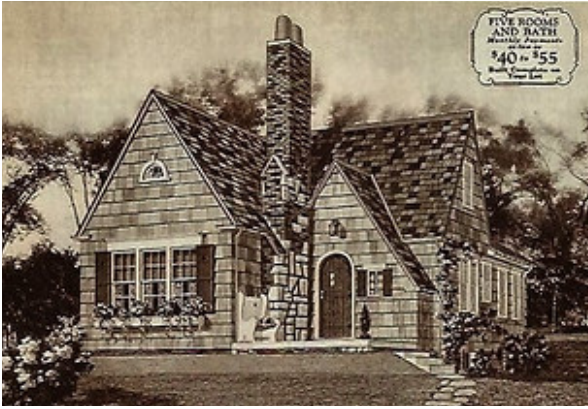
Elmwood, 1918 (open balcony)



Sunbeam, 1927 (balcony enclosed)

145 E. STREETSBORO STREET

Mitchell



In 1929, Marjorie Elgin (1906-1980) purchased land from Dennis J. Joyce (1855-1943) and built this English-type bungalow, believed to be the Sears Mitchell model. The Mitchell was first introduced in 1928 and was featured on the cover of the 1929 Sears home catalog. The home was meant to evoke an English cottage, complete with a batten door with wrought iron ornamental strap hinges and a fireplace and chimney made from stone or brick.

37 DIVISION STREET

Prescott



This house has strong characteristics of a Sears home Model P3240 or The Prescott. It would have cost \$1873.00 in 1926. The home has since had multiple renovations and much of the original structure is no longer visible.

Aladdin Houses

Founded in 1906, Aladdin Homes was the first major American kit home company, though less widely known as Sears. Aladdin survived longer and sold more homes than any other manufacturers of this time period. Aladdin Homes was founded by two Michigan brothers who were inspired by a mail order, pre-cut boat manufacturer and wanted to apply the same model to homes. In the 1920s, Aladdin also published a "Homecraft" catalog, which included furniture, lighting, dinnerware, bathroom fixtures, and more.



7383 DARROW ROAD

Marsden



The Aladdin home on Darrow Road is believed to have been built by Chandler Fick (1869–1949) in 1919. Fick was born in Michigan and likely would have been familiar with this Michigan-based manufacturer.

"Just study the lines of this bungalow and note how artistically appointed is every part"

Aladdin Houses Catalog, 1919 spring

Gordon Van-Tine Co.



U.N. Roberts Co., a Davenport, Iowa, sawmill, merged with another company to form the Gordon-Van Tine Co. to provide direct sale of millwork to the consumer. Several years later the company offered houses by catalogue. Gordon Van-Tine stopped house production during World War II.

16 BALDWIN STREET *No. 613*



In a 1950 photograph, 16 Baldwin resembles a no. 613 from Gordon Van-Tine. This home has since had multiple renovations and much of the original structure can no longer be seen.

Lustron



Lustron was a prefabricated steel home developed in response to the shortage of homes at the end of World War II. This variety of prefabricated home was developed and designed by Carl Strandlund (1899-1974) and later manufactured at a plant in Columbus, Ohio.

The zig-zag trellis (pictured far right) is a decorative feature unique to Lustrons.

147 ELM STREET *Westchester*



This Blue Westchester ranch home (no longer standing) was constructed in 1950. It was Hudson's only Lustron home.

The Westchester was Lustron's bestseller and was promoted as "lightning-safe" "decay-proof" and "termite and rodent proof." The kitchen included an appliance known as "The Thor" built exclusively for Lustron homes, a combination clothes and dishwashing machine.

Gunnison Homes



Gunnison Magic Homes, a prefabricated housing manufacturer, was founded in 1935 by Foster Gunnison. Often referred to as the “Henry Ford of housing,” Gunnison revolutionized home construction by introducing assembly line techniques—all parts of a house could be produced in just 25 minutes.

An entire home cost a consumer between \$2800-\$5000. By 1937, the company had developed a standardized wall panel system that could be used to create 12 different home models. In 1944, Gunnison sold his interest in the company to U.S. Steel, which continued producing homes until 1974.

230 & 234 W. STREETSBORO STREET



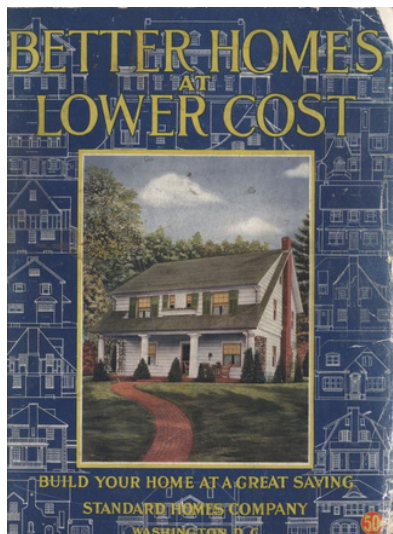
These two Gunnison homes on West Streetsboro Street were built side by side in 1956. Unlike most manufacturers, Gunnison homes were only available by dealer. Gust Kallstrom, Inc., a Cuyahoga Falls building and contracting company, was likely the local representative for Gunnison. In the 1950s, Gust Kallstrom, Inc., snapped up land in Hudson and Cuyahoga Falls, so it is very likely that there are more Gunnison (and other Kallstrom) homes in the area.

24 ROSLYN STREET

Gunnison homes are one-story ranches and can be identified by two horizontal lines on the chimney (pictured at right).

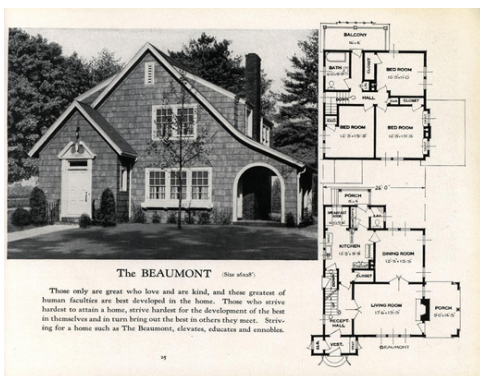


Standard Homes



Standard Homes was founded in 1917 by A. Gales Johnson, a salesman who worked for Ready Cut Homes in Detroit. Unlike kit companies who sold house plans along with all necessary pieces needed for construction, Standard Homes sold floor plans only. All floor plans were designed using standard stock length building materials in order to eliminate waste and lower costs. Still family-run, Standard Homes remains in business today.

154 S. MAIN STREET *Beaumont*



This ca. 1934 home on Main Street strongly resembles the Standard Homes Beaumont plan. The plan has an open side porch, which was likely enclosed at a later time on this home.

Resources

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Thornton, Rosemary Fuller. 2004. *Finding the Houses That Sears Built : A Guide to the 60 Most Popular Designs*. 1st ed. Alton, Ill.: Gentle Beam Publications.

Special thanks to Cindy Catanzaro, kit homes expert, who runs the website *Sears Houses in Ohio* (<https://searshousesinohio.wordpress.com/>). Cindy was instrumental in assisting with many of these identifications.



Are You Looking for a Home?

THIS book has solved the home building problem for thousands of people. No matter whether you are looking for an imposing residence, a modern bungalow or a cozy cottage you will surely be able to make a suitable choice from the 116 designs illustrated, described and priced in the following pages. If you have made up your mind to break away from the rent paying class this year and take the independent way of home owners you could not possibly have made a better beginning than you have by getting this book of Modern Houses. You do not of the kind that would cost you about \$10000 from a local architect. For our offer of free plans see page 5. We furnish materials for the house of your choice, from the foundation to the roof, with the exception of cement, brick and plaster, which we do not furnish. Our materials are guaranteed to be the best of their kind on the market, leaving a permanent building.

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SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO., CHICAGO.

Image Sources

Sears, Roebuck & Co.

- Sears Modern Homes catalog, cover, 1936

Vallonia & Conway

- Vallonia: Image and floor plan, Sears catalog, 1927
- 18 Roslyn - Hudson Library slide collection
- Conway: Sears catalog, 1927
- 23 Roslyn, William Moos photographs (M78.466)

Haverhill & Milford

- Haverhill: Sears catalog, 1936
- Milford: Sears catalog, 1934
- 85 Hudson Street: (M78.273)
- 91 Hudson Street: Moos (M78.274)

Mitchell & Prescott

- House: Sears catalog, 1930
- Cover: Sears, 1929
- Prescott: Sears, 1930
- 37 Division: Moos (M78.188)

Crescent:

- Sears Modern Homes, 1921

Aladdin Houses

- Cover: Aladdin Houses Homes catalog, 1912
- Homecrafts: Aladdin Houses Homecraft catalog, 1916
- Marsden: Aladdin, spring 1919

Gordon Van-Tine Co.

- Gordon Van-Tine Homes catalog, 1926
- 16 Baldwin: Moos (M78.68)
- No. 613: Gordon Van-Tine, 1922

Lustron

- Cover: Lustron Home Booklet (ca. 1946-52), Ohio History Connection via Ohio Memory (<https://ohiomemory.ohiohistory.org/archives/6086>)
- Advertisement: "[Lustron Home Ad, 1948](#)" by [Alden Jewell](#), CC BY 2.0 (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/autohistorian/32819316383>)
- 147 Elm: Ruth Snyder Charvat scrapbook (C43.30)

Gunnison Homes

- Cover: Gunnison Homes catalog, 1950, (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/jenosale/albums/72157627624319138/>)
- 230 W. Streetsboro: Moos (M78.555)
- 234 W. Streetsboro: Moos (M78.553)

Standard Homes

- 154 S. Main: Moos (M78.489)
- Standard: Standard Home Catalog, 1930
- Beaumont: Standard Home Catalog, 1928



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