BARNS BY MAIL: PRE-CUT KIT BARNS BY MAIL-ORDER CATALOG IN THE MIDWEST FROM 1900 TO 1930

By
JOY E. SEARS

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With the events of the last half of the twentieth century, the United States seems bent on leaving a legacy of Walmarts, strip malls and overall sprawl for future generations. We are losing our barns, our "cathedrals of the prairies." We seem intent on destroying our windows to the past, and what images of tradition that are still standing seemed doomed to be relics and romantic ruins for our nostalgia. Our once agrarian society has come full turn to become one of an urban mindset.

The gambrel-roofed barn that I remember from my childhood seems to be destined for neglect and demolition. Our current agricultural environment consists of metal pole "neo-barns," round bales, and agri-business that has engulfed our once- proud farming families and communities. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the rural population has radically decreased as people moved to urban centers. It is common for people not to have stepped foot on a farm and not know a combine from a manure spreader. Are barns and family farms going to become a forgotten aspect of our society?

In my study of rural and barn preservation and my love of book collecting, I happened upon a book during the summer of 1997, entitled *The American Barn* by Randy Leffingwell. In the chapter titled "Barn Renaissance," the author contrasts the highly individual barn designed by world-renowned architect Frank Lloyd Wright for his aunt's Spring Green, Wisconsin farm and the mass-produced mail-order kit barns by Sears, Roebuck and Company. I had read about mail-order kit barns in *Barns of the Midwest* published two years earlier. I was thrilled to see in *The American Barn,* there were pictures, not just advertisements, of the actual Sears mail-order barns and that is what sparked my interest.

I was born and raised in largely agricultural central Minnesota; and, as the daughter of someone whose dream was to be a farmer, this upbringing provided my early preparation for barn research. After moving to Eugene for my graduate study in Historic Preservation, my scholarly research of barns began. Since then, I have written numerous articles and papers on barns and rural preservation, including articles for the Associated Students for Historic Preservation (ASHP) graduate newsletter. I also had the opportunity to visit the Orange, Virginia area in April 1999, to stop at the barns discussed by Randy Leffingwell in *The American Barn* that inspired this thesis.

The midwest section of the United States was open to settlement in varying degrees by the mid 1800s. Some settlers were immigrants just in from the other countries while others were second-generation transplants from the already settled eastern United States. Where possible, early pioneers built small traditional structures from locally available materials. Some immigrants, such as the Czech and German-Russians that settled in areas of southeastern South Dakota, built combination house-barns from chaulkrock and adobe for these unique multi-purpose buildings.

Barns built in the nineteenth century were typically traditional in design and function having few or no windows and doors. The settlers honed their skills of log construction to create timber-bent frames held together with mortise and tendon connections and hand-wrought hardware. The one-story or one-and-one-half-story barns mainly stored crops and a few animals but overall the livestock weathered the elements, as they had in the Europe or the eastern states. On average, however, the climate was much harsher in the Midwest and the self-supporting farmer required many small specialized farm structures to take raise a variety of crops and livestock.

The progression to a cash-crop economy necessitated replacement of their little village of structures. The pioneer structures were too small for large herds of livestock and often were hard to adapt because the barns accommodated livestock and crop storage on the same level. The late nineteenth century and early twentieth century barns are characterized by a gable or later gambrel roof of varying framing techniques, few windows, square wooden cupolas, lightning rods, timber frames or modified built-up frames and doors with commercial hardware. These barns were increasingly not built according to tradition or passed-on inherent wisdom from past generations, were ever-changing as advancements in agricultural practices proliferated through literature and education.

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large two-story structure with either a gambrel or gothic roof. The ground level of the barn housed animals and large capacity hay storage on the second level. There are a number of factors that contributed to the development of the “big red barn” or the “modern” barn. Dr. Lowell Soike identifies these factors as new framing skills of log construction to create timber-bent frames held together with mortise and tendon connections and hand-wrought hardware. The one-story or one-and-one-half-story barns mainly stored crops and a few animals but overall the livestock weathered the elements, as they had in the Europe or the eastern states. On average, however, the climate was much harsher in the Midwest and the self-supporting farmer required many small specialized farm structures to take raise a variety of crops and livestock.

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Other factors, in no particular order, contributing to making mail-order architecture a twentieth century phenomenon include:

- Standardization of cut-lumber.
- The Rural Free Delivery Act of 1896.
- Expansion of the rail lines.
- Increasing population of the United States.
- Modernization of the agricultural situation.
- Continuing development of prefabrication technology in the U.S.
- Rising costs associated with labor and materials.
- Increasing scarcity of large-dimension lumber.
- Standardization of barn designs.

After the turn of the twentieth century, new legislation increasingly pushed for new or remodeled barns that were well built, properly lit and well ventilated to provide a healthier environment for the farmer and his animals. Because planning a barn or farm building on paper eliminates many of the problems or concerns before construction begins, it became unacceptable to not seek advice on properly building a modern barn that met the newly implemented sanitary standards and laws.

Although house pattern book publishers, such as Palliser, Palliser & Co., prospered in the late nineteenth century, the few barns and farm buildings they offered to customers seem to have minimal impact on the agricultural environment. Other companies also marketed mail-order building plans. Prefabricated and mail-order housing existed in the nineteenth century, but difficulty in shipping prevented them from being widespread until the beginning of the twentieth century when railroads were reaching even isolated areas. Since the building materials arrived via railroad cars, they were available at the station, or a drop-off point, and taken by horse-drawn wagon or later by truck to the actual destination.

The United States population increased from just over sixty-two million people in 1890 to over ninety-one million people in 1910. With a flood of new immigrants and a skyrocketing birthrate, the need for new buildings, such as houses and barns, rose sharply across the country. Because of the

trials of westward expansion, the early settlers would not spare a large amount of time for immediate shelter. People did not have the available cut lumber, other raw materials or tools to build any buildings quickly or inexpensively. The construction of small temporary buildings, such as sod houses or log cabins, established claims on the land. Even before widespread electrification and convenient power tools, hand tools of any kind were a luxury for anyone other then a working carpenter.

Farmers wanted to replace their temporary buildings after a certain period and build modern barns that showed their wealth and dedication to the land. Tradition had been to build post-and-beam barns utilizing large timber bents. This construction was no longer feasible as the locally existing supplies of large-scale timber were decreasing and becoming more expensive across the nation; plans for barns using small-dimension lumber and requiring smaller work forces were ideal and became a growing trend.

Consumers could buy small-dimension lumber from the local lumber mill, or yard, and thus forced to pay the going rate for the grade of lumber the mill had available. The other option was to buy from mail-order catalog companies and receive standard dimensional lumber at a less expensive price, with a money back guarantee. Up to 1909, mail-order general merchandise catalog companies such as Sears, Roebuck and Company already carried a wide variety of building supplies, but they did not carry complete structures. Sears is the most well known of the mail-order houses, but Sears was not the first company to enter the mail-order housing business or the first to offer pre-cut kit houses.

Schweitzer and Davis, in *America's Favorite Homes*, hail the Aladdin Company of Bay City, Michigan as the "pioneer" of the twentieth century pre-cut catalog houses. In 1906-07, they appear to be the first to use the pre-cut idea for buildings. Starting in 1910, the Gordon-Van Tine Company of Davenport, Iowa, claims to be the first to offer a commercial line of mail-order pre-cut, prefabricated houses. Prefabrication was less expensive because it eliminated the additional middleman cost and material waste normally associated with standard building. Hand-built construction allows for up to twenty percent waste of raw materials, and that rate could be higher depending on the competency of the carpenter or builder. With prefabrication, however, the waste was near zero. Sears had already offered building materials and plans but it was not until 1916, according to Schweitzer and Davis, that Sears offered pre-cut lumber.

This thesis will focus on brief histories of several mail-order companies that offered kit barns; the advertising, terms, and specifications of these companies and a comparison of designs offered by the various companies. It will be limited to barns, though these were not the only farm buildings offered by the companies. In addition, there is no discussion of companies that offered farm buildings and barns composed of materials such as cement and various masonry materials.

The discussion of the thesis will focus on the period 1900 to 1930. For the most part, the companies that offered mail-order architecture began after the turn of the twentieth century. The 1910s brought the advancement of mail-order architecture, and for a brief period, World War I slowed this growth. The climax of the mail-order architecture was during the 1920s when buildings were prefabricated and sturdy, but not portable. Once the prefabricated buildings were constructed, they looked very much, if not exactly, like their hand-constructed counterparts. With the start of the Great Depression, the 1930s forced most of the companies to curtail or end production and virtually all the companies had ceased production by or during World War II. Prefabrication earned a bad reputation for inferior quality and construction towards the end of the 1930s and into the 1940s. However, after World War II, the massive housing crunch opened the way for revolutionary prefabrication construction techniques (not discussed), such as manufactured homes.

For the purpose of this thesis, the definition of a mail-order barn is as follows: a pre-cut or sectional kit barn purchased from a manufacturer through a catalog and delivered by railroad, truck, or wagon to its final destination.

Prefabrication refers to those barns constructed of pre-cut lumber or composed of preassembled sections.

The definition of the pre-cut method of building construction is that all measuring and sawing is completed at the factory; the pieces are numbered or marked and bundled accordingly for easy assembly.

The definition of the panel or sectional method of building construction is that the materials are pre-cut then assembled into solid-unit sections that can be set up for easy assembly.

By Midwest, the author means the area encompassing North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Illinois and Indiana

Plank-frame (heavy plank) framing of a gambrel-roofed barn refers to a barn where the heavy framework extends from the top of the platform wall construction of the first level.

Braced rafter (light truss) framing has the "framework made from 2-inch lumber, and the studs extend from the sill to the eaves."

This thesis research is a survey of the mail-order barns offered through various commercial farm building sales and plan services of the Midwest in the first two decades of the twentieth century. These barns are assumed located virtually all over the continental United States. Canada could be figured in this equation but this has been dealt with in G. E. Mills's *Buying Wood & Building Farms: Marketing Lumber and Farm Buildings Designs on the Canadian Prairies 1880 to1920* (Ottawa, 1991). From research to date, there has been a great deal written about the mail-order kit homes that were marketed, especially by Sears, but little or nothing about barns or other structures.

Research to this point has indicated that Sears, Roebuck and Company of Chicago; Montgomery Ward & Company of Chicago; Gordon Van-Tine Company of Davenport, Iowa; Chicago House Wrecking Company / Harris Brothers Company of Chicago; and the Aladdin Company of Bay City, Michigan, offered mail-order barns through their house catalogs or in separate farm building catalogs.

Some of their competitors, who offered barn plans and planning services, included the Louden Machinery Company of Fairfield, Iowa; James Manufacturing Company of Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin (which offered the Jamesway line of equipment); and Hunt, Helm, Ferris, and Company of Harvard, Illinois (which offered the "Star Line" of equipment). Even though these companies sold barn plans, their main purpose was to offer up-to-date advice to sell their company's lines of modern farm equipment. Specifications and complete working plans could be obtained for a nominal fee, such as $5.00. The books published by the Louden Company, James Manufacturing and Hunt, Helm, Ferris, and Company illustrated successful farm buildings built by farmers, gave advice on advances made in barn design, and especially showcased their barn equipment. Testimonials, accompanied by farm building photographs, were included from past customers praising the virtues of the designs and equipment. William Radford and his Radford Architectural Company of Chicago published scores of books in the late part of the nineteenth century and the early part of the twentieth century. Books such as *Radford's Practical Barn Plans* were packed with agricultural and farm-building advice. Various chapters in the books are dedicated to different types of farming and livestock raising. In fact, Radford developed a specialized and separate farm-building department in 1909. The "Department of Dairy Barns" a chapter in *Radford's Practical Barn Plans* offered blueprint plans of featured farm buildings for $15.00. All the barns introduced showed elevations, plans, and details along with much discussion of the advantages of that particular design.

In the early part of the twentieth century, both Orange Judd Publishing Company, New York and the Sanders Publishing Company, Chicago / *The Breeder's Gazette*, offered building planning advice and up-to-date information about barns and a range of other farm buildings through their numerous books and periodicals. Over the years, Sanders compiled contributions and published them in *The Breeder's Gazette* describing "actual constructions from practical men." The published barn plans were intended as guides and the compiler stressed that the featured farm buildings might not suit a farmer's individual needs. Orange Judd featured a large number of actual barns and farm buildings and wrote in detail about the buildings and the operations on the farm.

Companies like the Weyerhaeuser Sales Company, in attempting to market their "4-Square" brand of lumber, incorporated barn and farm building plans designed by agricultural colleges into their own massive 11 inch by 17 inch hardcover catalogs that were available for preview at the local lumberyard. Full-size working plans could be ordered from the sales division in St. Paul, Minnesota. Since the material lists were included in the catalogs, farmers could get a reasonably accurate estimate of the cost of new farm buildings from the lumberyard or mill. Once the working plans arrived, the farmer bought his supplies and followed the plans to build his new farm building, safe in the assurance that the design had been tested before being offered for sale.

For the most part, the farm buildings and farming literature of the period provided farmers with adequate information to build barns with their own hands. Published examples of early modern barns and changing agricultural practices that were available in the same time frame as the mail-order kit barns include: Sanders Publishing Company's *Farm Buildings* (1907); Ekblaw's *Farm Structures* (1917); Halstead's *Barn Plans and Outbuildings* (1918); Roberts's *The Farmer: His Own Builder* (1918); Hopkins's *Modern Farm Buildings (*1920); and early editions of Carter and Foster's *Farm Buildings*.

No discussion of mail-order kit barns was mentioned as an option; instead, the literature shows examples of barns and farm buildings already built by farmers. Although companies advertised in popular magazines, it seems unlikely that the information was disseminated adequately; perhaps the companies relied additionally on word of mouth since most catalogs were not sent out unless requested. Farming literature also offered up-to-date information about barns that are similar in nature to the mail-order kit barns. The farmer still had to acquire the lumber and, using the company's information, build it himself.

Another development in barn evolution was the creation of land-grant agricultural colleges, which, in turn, opened experimental research stations. The experiment stations gave detailed thought to the design of new barns, other farm buildings, and farming practices to be used in the twentieth century. Old barns were never dismissed as they could be adapted or re-equipped to become modern, sanitary barns that were healthy for the farmer and his animals. Companies like Louden Machinery Company published examples of barns that had been refitted, or to use Louden's slogan, "To modernize your farm, Loudenize your barn," with their equipment and brought up-to-date for a reasonable price.

Previous studies that the author has researched (other than the actual manufacturers' catalogs) have certain limitations. Little is said about barns in Jandl and Stevenson's *Houses By Mail*, or Hanou's *A Round Indiana* (where Chicago House Wrecking is refereed to as Chicago Wrecking House). There is a chapter about Sears mail-order barns in Randy Leffingwell's *The American Barn*, some coverage in Noble and Wilhelm's *Barns in the Midwest* and Soike's *Without Right Angles: The Round Barns of Iowa*. Schweitzer and Davis's *America's Favorite Homes* deals mainly with the pre-cut and sectional kit home building industry in the Midwest but does mention and illustrate some barns.

With the study of the mail-order kit barns in the Midwest from 1900 to 1930, the author hopes to accomplish several objectives: First, to provide a historical overview of the mail-order companies that provided barn plans and mail-order barns. Second, to document the variety of designs and plans in illustrations, drawings, and text. Third, to document the comparison and contrast of the barn designs and plans offered by the various companies; lastly, to determine the actual extant of the pre-cut barn's regional popularity and determine what factors promoted its selection. This information will be of interest to a broad audience including but not limited to agricultural experts, barn experts, vernacular architectural historians, and mail-order catalog collectors and enthusiasts.

COMPANY HISTORIES

Massive amounts of timber attracted many people to the Midwest around the turn of the twentieth century. Mills and yards sprang up all over the region to take advantage of the vast untouched resources. An abundance of timber meant that people now wanted to discard old building practices. The public looked forward at the beginning of the twentieth century and not backward. One way of looking forward was the application of new building techniques such as balloon framing or light framing to barns and farm buildings to make them more modern and efficient. This was the boom era of the pre-cut and sectional kit-building producers.

The starting point for the author's research was those companies listed by Schweitzer and Davis in *America's Favorite Homes*. The companies that the author examined are: Sears, Roebuck & Company; Montgomery Ward & Company; Aladdin Company; Hodgson Company; Lewis Manufacturing Company; Gordon-Van Tine Company; Sterling; Mershon & Morley; Chicago House Wrecking Company (CHW) / Harris Brothers, and the Ray H. Bennett Lumber Company. Most of the companies were Midwestern with the exceptions of both Hodgson Company from Dover, Massachusetts, and Bennett Lumber Company of Tonawanda, New York. To this point, the author can only say for sure that Sears, Ward, Gordon Van-Tine, Chicago House Wrecking / Harris and Aladdin offered barns either in their house catalogs or in separate farm building catalogs. To come up with a complete list of all the companies that produced pre-cut or sectional buildings would be nearly impossible today.

Hodgson Company

The first company to offer a prefabricated house line and stay in business, according to Schweitzer and Davis, was the Hodgson Company of Dover, Massachusetts. Ernest F. Hodgson of Boston began selling chicken coops made of door-like panels that fastened together. After the turn of

the twentieth century, he expanded to include single car garages which lead to the expansion of panelized vacation homes in 1902. In later years, he would expand his line to include year-round houses. He stayed in business selling by catalog until the 1970s unlike many of his competitors. Failure to locate any catalogs from this company produced little certainty of farm building listings.

Gordon-Van Tine Company

The Midwest was a thickly forested area that boasted a great deal of quality lumber; it was an area ready for the mail-order building businesses to begin business. The Gordon-Van Tine Company of Davenport, Iowa, was no exception, started in 1865 in Wisconsin as the U. (Uriah) N. Roberts Co., a wholesale building materials company. Moving to Davenport a year later, Mr. Roberts opened a small shop selling millwork. The company created Gordon – Van Tine as the selling corporation in 1906-7. Within four to five years, the company had expanded from just supplying millwork to selling prefabricated precut-type homes through their mail-order catalogs. A discrepancy exists here because according to Schweitzer and Davis, "the Roberts Company merged with another firm to form the Gordon – Van Tine Co." In 1908, Gordon – Van Tine opened a branch lumberyard, mill and factory in St. Louis. By 1915, the company had opened a plant in Chehalis, Washington to take advantage of the timber resources there. To compensate for the dwindling lumber resources in the Midwest, the company opened a lumber mill in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in 1919. The company's glory days were primarily the 1910s and 1920s. After celebrating their 75th anniversary in 1940 and having grown to 350 employees and 5 plants in 4 cities, the company appears to have quietly disappeared during World War II.

According to Ralph Christian and Dr. Lowell Soike of the Iowa Department of Cultural Affairs, Division of the State Historical Society, there appears to be little available information about Gordon – Van Tine. There was an effort several years ago to compile information during a historical and architectural survey of Davenport, Iowa, which turned up surprisingly little data. Dr. Soike and Mr. Christian concluded, "what company records existed apparently were discarded in the 40's, and surviving catalogs issued by the company are relatively few and for a scattering of dates." Most of Gordon – Van Tine catalogs owned by the historical society are photocopies. To date, a complete history of the company does not exist. The company stressed, "We guarantee satisfaction or money back" and "We guarantee to furnish enough of the various kinds of material to build each building according to the picture, the plans shown and the specifications given." On the top of every odd page appeared the phrase "Guaranteed Prices – No Extras." The company proclaimed "Seeing is believing" and they encouraged farmers to come to Davenport and inspect the facility. They were so sure that the potential buyer would be totally satisfied that the company would pay the railroad fare if a buyer felt misled in any way.

The company dedicated an entire page to "Why Gordon – Van Tine Are Best Able to Plan Your Barn." Gordon - Van Tine created a " Farm – Building Department" filled with farm specialists and headed by W. Kirkpatrick "The Barn Man." All the specialists had first hand knowledge of some aspect of building to deal specifically with the farm buildings found in their separate farm catalogs. The company offered barns from about 1915 and continued through the late 1930s.

Barn prices quoted in the catalogs from the 1917, undated (c. 1920s), 1923, and 1928 were strictly for the exteriors of the barns since the interiors would be different due to the varying needs of the individual farmer. The company understood that the needs of the Texas farmer were different from the Wisconsin farmer. Therefore, the floor plans were unique for each order.

Aladdin Company

Another big Midwestern catalog building supplier was the Aladdin Company of Bay City, Michigan, founded in 1906 as the North American Construction Company by two brothers, William and Otto Sovereign. Schweitzer and Davis hail Aladdin as the 'pioneer' of the twentieth-century pre-cut catalog houses because they appear to be the first ones to use the pre-cut idea for buildings. The idea for the pre-cut building stock originated from the pre-cut, mail-order boat kit companies that already existed in Bay City. Aladdin operated many years solely as mail-order taking operation because the company owned no lumber mills or yards outside of its immediate area.

When orders came in, the lumber came from their contract lumber mill, Lewis Manufacturing Company. This continued until 1916 when the Sovereign brothers parted company with Lewis, who started to issue their own line of mail-order catalog buildings two years before; the Sovereigns renamed their company Aladdin. "Under Lewis and on their own, Aladdin homes were produced by contract

lumber mills in Houston, Texas; Portland, Oregon; Wilmington, North Carolina; Hattiesburg, Mississippi; Toronto and Ottawa, Ontario; Vancouver, British Columbia; Missouri, Louisiana, and Florida, as well at the Bay City mills." The Aladdin Company had its heyday in the 1910s and 1920s. The company suffered after the stock market crash of 1929. Unlike many of their contemporaries, the company rallied and remained in business through the Great Depression and through World War II. After the 1950s, Aladdin saw a down swing in its sales and by the 1970s was barely in business. Aladdin managed to stay in the business of mail-order housing until 1982, and disbanded early in 1987. Family members cite "high interest rates and inflation" for smothering the housing market. Though numbers are available for the number of houses sold, there are no available numbers at this time for barns or any other building types. "Aladdin Readi-cut Barns" appeared in a two-page section in the back of the Aladdin house catalogs. The author located Aladdin house catalogs from 1915, 1917, and 1918. Aladdin offered barns primarily from 1910s through mid-1920s.

In addition to Aladdin, there were at least two other lesser-known mail-order building suppliers, Lewis and Sterling, also based in Bay City. Founded in 1896, Lewis Manufacturing Company opened as a planing mill. The company initially started offering pre-cut cottages in 1914, and stayed in business until 1973, when the company closed due to financial difficulties. The author was able to make one inquiry for a 1936 Liberty Homes catalog but no barns were mentioned. The Lewis Manufacturing Company was lesser known then Aladdin. Sterling Homes offered by the International Mill and Timber Company were the least known though they stayed in business from 1915-16 to 1975. It is unclear if the companies ever offered any barns in their catalogs.

Montgomery Ward & Company

Aaron Montgomery Ward attempted to open his own Chicago mail-order business in 1871. He lost all his stock in the Great Chicago fire, but recovered by the next year and published the world's first general mail-order catalog. Ward was the first to introduce the "Satisfaction Guaranteed or Your Money Back" policy in his 1875 catalog. This policy would remain central to Wards philosophy of doing business.

Montgomery Ward & Company entered the mail-order building business about 1910. Schweitzer and Davis claim Montgomery Ward offered barns in their 1912 *Building Plans of Modern Homes* catalog. The company adopted the name Wardway Homes in 1918 and continued this enterprise until 1931. The author contacted the Montgomery Ward archives located in the American Heritage Center at the University of Wyoming, Laramie. Available were examples of barns from the 1916 through 1919 house catalogs. Little information on the Montgomery Ward's barns, other than those shown in the catalogs was available. Ward's barns did not appear to be a popular feature, in contrast to those of Ward's major competitor, Sears. Ward offered barns through their homes catalogs until about 1920 (a 1923 Wardway Homes catalog contained no barns).

Ward owned a mill in an unspecified city in eastern Iowa that supplied the millwork for doors, windows, frames, trim, and wood materials. Hardware, paints, and other smaller retail items came from the Chicago general merchandise warehouse. Ward listed the following branch houses in the 1923 catalog: Chicago; Portland, Oregon; Fort Worth, Texas; Saint Paul, Minnesota; and Kansas City, Missouri. Mills and lumberyards operated out of Portland, Fort Worth, and Kansas City where nearby timber resources were still available. Montgomery Ward had stopped selling pre-built buildings in 1926, according to Hoge, who claimed buyers were having problems making timely payments on their buildings. Ward avoided the big scandal of foreclosure that Sears would experience in a few more years. Schweitzer and Davis contend that Wardway Homes existed until 1931 and a catalog of that year showing houses suggests Hoge was in error.

Chicago House Wrecking Company / Harris Brothers Company

Contrary to their name, Chicago House Wrecking Company may not have wrecked houses. Hanou claims that the company began business after the Chicago Fire of 1871, when there was a need to demolish burned houses. Another account claims four brothers in Chicago named Harris organized the company in 1893 to dismantle the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition. After dismantling the Chicago World's Columbian Exposition, Chicago House Wrecking "purchased and dismantled" Omaha's 1899 Trans-Mississippi Exposition, Buffalo's 1901 Pan-American Exposition, and the St. Louis Louisiana Purchase Exposition of 1904. The company bought the expositions, dismantled them, and sold the salvaged materials. This proved profitable and after 1908, the company expanded to selling

new lumber.

According to a 1910 catalog entitled simply *A Book of Plans*, the company went the next step to offering stock plans and building materials for houses and farm buildings. The company supplied detailed plans, specifications, and bills of materials; and then offered building materials in sufficient quantities to finish the building. However, the buyer still had to cut the lumber to fit. In addition to the *Plan Book of Harris Homes*, the company also had a general merchandise catalog that competed with Ward and Sears. Sometime around 1914, the company apparently shifted to using Harris Brothers Company, and began offering sectional buildings by 1919. They appear to be one of the few companies that offered building plans first and then moved on to kit buildings.

The company's patent-pending system called "Presto-up" and consisted of four by eight foot panels bolted together. These "Wonder Buildings of the Age" shipped directly from their Chicago plant. Other than houses and garages, the company offered "General Purpose Buildings" that could be used for churches, schools, barns, dance halls, and warehouses. According to Schweitzer and Davis, the company went out of business sometime around 1938.

Sears, Roebuck and Company

Richard Warren Sears started his mail-order business in 1886, with a shipment of watches in North Redwood, Minnesota where Sears worked as a Station Agent. Thus the R. W. Sears Watch Company was born. Business was so prosperous that operations moved to Chicago to take advantage of better transportation and a more central location. This is where Alvah Curtis Roebuck, watch repairman, joined the company. Sears sold the profitable company and returned to Minnesota while Roebuck was in Toronto operating a branch of the company. Back in Minnesota, Sears returned to the watch and jewelry business as the Warren Company. Though this venture was profitable in 1891, Sears sold the company to Roebuck who renamed the company A. C. Roebuck Company. Sears soon bought back into the company and in 1893, the mail-order company evolved into the Sears, Roebuck and Company and moved back to Chicago as its main base of operations.

Sears, Roebuck and Company might not have gotten into the mail-order building business if it had it had not been for Frank Kushel. As early as 1895, the company was selling various building materials and supplies; however, according to Stevenson and Jandl, these items were not big sellers. Sears transferred Frank Kushel, his China department manager, to close out the building materials department. Kushel took the initiative to make this department a success, in the spirit of Sears himself. By 1908, the first catalog devoted exclusively to mail-order homes entitled *Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans* premiered.

Sears, like Aladdin, expanded their holdings after the early years and between 1909 and 1912 the company purchased a lumber mill in Mansfield, Louisiana, a lumberyard in Cairo, Illinois, and a millwork plant in Norwood, Ohio. The lumberyard in Cairo was the key, because it was located on a rail line at a rate-breaking point, thus lowering the cost of lumber. Being near enough to the center of the United States, shipping was easy in any direction and the forty-acre yard was more than enough to store the pre-cut lumber before assemblage into kits and sent out on boxcars. Sears offered four barns alongside their houses in their 1910 *Book of Homes*. Quite similar in appearance is *Homes in a Box – Modern Homes from Sears Roebuck*, facsimile reproduction of an early Sears *Modern Homes* catalog published by Schiffer Publishing Ltd. The catalog appears to date from either 1912 or 1913. There are four barn models exactly like the ones in the 1910 catalog with increased prices.

Boris Emmet and John Jeuck, in their comprehensive history of the Sears, Roebuck and Company, entitled *Catalogues and Counters* observed, "the company has never been an innovator in products" and carried those items that the consumer wanted. As Leffingwell remarks, "Sears' success, in short, came from giving its buyers a high-quality version of exactly what they asked for at a price they could afford." Almost from the start, Sears offered financing of new buildings.

The separation of the farm buildings from the houses in 1918, into a separate catalog was a reflection on the popularity of the farm buildings offered. Sears published that year *The Book of Barns--Honor-Bilt-Already Cut* that offered fifty-six pages of barns, hog houses, chicken coops, granaries, and other farm buildings.

Sears kept its architects and lumber millers busy designing and improving their barns. Sears' own architects sometimes designed barns but the company did not establish an official design department until the Architectural Division creation in 1919. Farmers were not limited to the designs in the catalogs but were encouraged to design their own barn. Sears would develop the material

requirements from the design and provide them their pre-cut lumber and materials. Sears aimed to please their customers; buyers were encouraged to give the company feedback about their barn designs.

By 1925, with the success of both "Honor-Bilt" Homes and farm buildings, the company acquired another forty-acre lumber mill and yard in Newark, New Jersey. The kit barns shipped on one or more rail cars from the yard in Cairo, Illinois or Newark, New Jersey to the nearest rail drop point. It was then loaded on a truck or horse-drawn wagon for delivery to the farm.

In 1926, the separate "Farm Building Catalog E504MH" was available on request by mail. There was an ad in the *Sears, Roebuck Catalog of Houses, 1926* featuring the catalog entitled *Modern Farm Buildings: Already Cut and Fitted Barn Equipment*, which boasted savings of '$100 to $500 on your barn' and offered as an example a 28 foot by 34 foot gothic-roofed barn for $695. By late 1929, Sears had extended so much credit for its new buildings that they soon found themselves in the position of foreclosing on many of their customers. The legacy of the Sears mail-order barn business ended in 1934, when the Modern Homes Department disbanded. Reintroduced in 1935, with a separate steel-framing supplier, the company offered no barns. By 1940, Sears was out of the prefabricated mail-order housing business and though the company boasted of selling more than 100,000 houses, no one ever counted the barns.

All the companies were located on major rail lines and had water transportation available. Sears, Ward, and Harris Brothers were all based in Chicago, the big merchandising and shipping center of the Midwest and had access to Lake Michigan. Gordon-Van Tine was located in farming community of Davenport, Iowa, on the Mississippi River. The Aladdin Company was located on the shores of Saginaw Bay in Bay City, Michigan, with access to Lake Huron.

In respect to the mail-order catalog companies, there were countless other small companies not mentioned. These small companies could be located potentially anywhere there was an adequate timber supply and transportation. Many of these companies climaxed before the Great Depression and if records or catalogs have survived, they are in someone's private collection.

PROPOGRANDA, SPECIFICATIONS, AND TERMS

Farmers needed substantial barns and farm buildings to be able to carry out their farming operations. Farm buildings were investments for their futures. A poorly built barn would inhibit their earning potential. The farmer needed a fairly skilled and large crew to build a post and beam barn, as well as access to large-scale timber. The actual building of any farm building consumed a considerable amount of time and money. The farmer had to order the barn plans and lumber from mail-order catalog houses or purchase the lumber locally. In response to this problem, the mail-order catalog companies filled the gap by offering complete modern kit barns. Most of the barns offered required only a few simple tools, usually two or three people, and the ability to follow plans for assembly. Since the kits came with everything (excluding masonry materials), assembly was relatively quick and inexpensive compared to finding skilled barn builders or paying local prices for questionable dimensional lumber.

Montgomery Ward

The prices listed in the catalogs were f. o. b. (free on board) railroad cars at the mills and factories. In addition, all lumber was quoted f. o. b. at the different yards depending on the lumber and location of destination. Each order was filled from the nearest mill to the order's destination to save the customer freight costs. If the consumer wanted the actual delivery prices on all freight, he/she filled out an enclosed "Information Blank." Ward's payment terms varied: cash with order, remittance of one-fourth, or statement of deposit. The cash with order allowed the buyer to take a "two per cent [sic]" discount. While this method might not be advisable today, Wards said that the buyer was "protected absolutely by our binding guarantee of satisfaction." The remittance of one-fourth, with the balance being C. O. D., did not allow for the discount. Once the order was at the station, the buyer had five days to inspect his freight and pay the balance. The third option was statement, which allowed the buyer to send $100.00 with the order and deposit the remainder in the consumer's bank or a building and loan association. The financial institution filled out a supplied statement of deposit form, upon receipt of deposit, which specified that the buyer had five days to inspect the freight and express satisfaction with the order. No discount was available with option number three.

There must have been a great deal of trust in the early part of the twentieth century. Catalog customers sent in orders of varying amounts of cash and total guarantees of satisfaction with their orders. The buyer was at the mercy of the mail-order company, but also the mail-order company had everything to lose if they betrayed the trust of their customers. Wards stressed no extra costs, and if an order was short, or if unsatisfactory materials were furnished, they made good on their binding agreement. The word guarantee appears repeatedly throughout the Ward's catalogs. Ward was a general merchandise company, so it already had a long customer list and a good history with the nation. The 1923 Wardway home catalog reasserted their then fifty-year-old motto of "Satisfaction Guaranteed or Your Money Back."

"Buy for Cash and Save Money!" advertised as a "double savings" as the company and the buyer paid cash for orders. No extension of credit meant the company lost no money through bad accounts. The buyer paid "the actual cost of materials plus the one small profit we ask on each sale." This may explain why the company did not stay in this venture long. Wards dedicated many promotional pages at the front of their 1923 catalog to explaining why and how they could offer such low prices and high quality at the same time. They told the potential consumer the location of their mills and factories. Total specifications for all buildings, what quality, and variety of lumber needed for each section was listed.

Wardway buildings were assembled of "ready-cut" wood construction. Each plan was "perfected" down to the last detail to eliminate waste on the building site. All parts were clearly marked for easy assembly by either carpenters or the buyer himself. It seems that the mail-order building catalogs discounted the carpenter with his hand tools as being wasteful and slow. The buyer had the opportunity, in most cases, of buying the building not "ready-cut," at a higher cost, with all necessary lumber included in standard lengths for regular construction. Each model of barn had a list of general specifications on each page. The prices listed were for the materials that the company furnished. For example, Barn No. 205 pictured in the 1916 *Wardway Homes* catalog, carried the claim: "For $478.00 we will furnish the material for this barn, consisting of lumber, sash, hardware, paint and our Radio slate surfaced roofing which is guaranteed for 15 years."

Each farmer and farm had different requirements so interior features were available for an additional cost. The buyer could include a rough sketch of what he desired, and Wards would create a specific building estimate. Wards did not include cement or any masonry materials with the kits. These materials were expensive to send and more inexpensively obtained closer to the destination. Included on the page was an estimate of the total cost of the barn "allowing a fair estimate for labor and cement."

The general specifications for barn construction included framing type, information about doors, windows and hardware, roofing material and enough for two coats of "our famous Coverall Barn Paint, any color we list." Equipment, such as a hay carrier, was available from the company. No information from the archives was available and all accessible photocopies were black and white. All framing lumber for Barn No. 205 was No. 1 quality yellow pine. Window and door frames came unassembled for construction on-site.

Wards, as all the other companies, had to diversify their holdings. The timber resources of the upper Midwest were vanishing soon after the turn of the twentieth century thus forcing the companies to open or buy new timber operations in the West and South where good timber was still obtainable. The companies had to have operations located where good timber resources were available. Douglas fir and varieties of pine were the most readily available in large quantities.

Gordon-Van Tine

"We Guarantee Satisfaction or Money Back" and "No Extras" also seem to have been the mantras of the Gordon – Van Tine Company. These claims appeared on every other page of their catalog. Later this would change slightly to "Guaranteed Prices-No Extras." In the 1917 Gordon—Van Tine farm buildings catalog, there are seven pages of company information, propaganda, and information about the materials used in the construction of the buildings. Following this, numerous pages filled with barns and other farm buildings. An undated catalog and the 1923 catalog open with a full page that featured three upstanding letters from local Davenport banks. Gordon-Van Tine was striving to answer all their customers' potential questions. The catalog contained a full page dedicated to an index of the types of farm buildings, also a list of questions and the location of answers.

The undated catalog and the 1923 catalog have building price pages, pages of propaganda filled with what the company offered, why and how they could offer the consumer the best price, and the

three types of framing methods offered in the various barns. The 1928 catalog has virtually the same opening pages but cites different banks guaranteeing them; and lists only sample price quotes. The buyer had to fill out an enclosed plan sheet with as much information as possible and mail this in an enclosed envelope to receive a quote for the particular barn shipped to their station by mail.

Payment options listed in the 1917 catalog stated: send the full cash amount less two percent with order, or submit the order blank with the guaranty section filled out by the banker or Building & Loan Association. No discount was available with the second option. If the consumer chose the second option, the consumer inspected the order upon arrival. If the consumer was not satisfied upon inspecting the shipment, the banker would not pay the company. If the consumer was satisfied, the banker would send the money to the company within five days of receipt. The undated catalog offers the same options on page seven. The 1923 catalog offered a third option that allowed the buyer to send one-fifth of the total order and then send the remainder within five days of receipt of the order. The guaranty section or statement of deposit was no longer on the information blank and moved to the bottom of page five. The order blank information was unavailable because it was not included in the copy of the 1923 catalog received from the Davenport Public Library. The catalog stated that if the buyer felt rushed and found it impossible to wait for a price quote, he/she could order straight from the catalog, use any of the three terms for payment, and the order processed immediately. The company issued freight charges and expected payment upon arrival of the order.

On the order blank of the 1917 farm building catalog, the company states for the quoted prices the following is included: “all lumber, finishing lumber, doors, windows, material for door frames, and nails, hardware, flashing tin, complete painting materials and hay carrier outfit where specified.” The specifications were listed generally for every barn model. All barns came with “Extra Clear 5-2 Red Cedar shingles” and instead of “common barn paint”; they shipped “Quality Brand” house paint in a selection of colors. Cypress or “Wood Eternal” seemed to be a popular wood due to its use in virtually every barn. Specifications in the 1920s catalog split into two categories: “Class A” and “Class B.” “Class A” buildings were composed of the finest materials. The catalog states “Class B buildings are the same as Class A in strength, general construction and appearance, but have been reduced in price by a careful selection of materials for siding, roof, sills, etc.”

Specifications are listed either on the page with the barn design or on the facing page, including information about the type of barn and details about the construction. Specifications in the 1923 catalog were as in the undated catalog except “Class A” was renamed “Gold Medal” and “Class B” was renamed “Standard.” There were two different pages of specifications listed in the front of the catalog, one for “Standard,” and one for the higher quality “Gold Medal.” The materials included for each type of barn were listed from quality of lumber to type of hardware. The barns were either “Standard” or “Gold Medal” as stated on the barn model pages. “Standard” barn models came with “strong manufactured doors, window frames, finest barn paint and slate-surfaced, fire-resisting roofing.” All “Gold Medal” barns came with “strong, manufactured doors, window frames, Quality house paint and 5 to 2 cedar shingles.”

The main difference between the two barn types was the kind of lumber furnished, the type of roofing material, and the quality of paint. All lumber, no matter what the variety, was described as being clear. The “Standard” barn models only came with red mineral paint for the body and white for the trim. The “Gold Medal” barns were provided with house paint and the buyer given their choice of colors. The 1928 catalog is no different from the 1923 specifications other than the type of lumber for both the “Standard” and “Gold Medal” and this depended on which mill supplied the lumber.

Roof ventilators and cupolas were available separately because the number and size used on the barn varied. All interior arrangements were drawn up separately by Gordon – Van Tine’s architects, or used the buyer’s rough sketch, to best meet the farmer’s needs. Clarified in the 1928 catalog, the information sheet had graph paper on the backside to allow a better quality sketch for the buyer. This transferred into barn plans sent to the potential buyer with no obligation to buy. Barns sold “Ready-Framed” to save the customer the most money. All orders were sent F.O.B. from whatever mill was the closest to the final destination with lumber being slightly different depending on the region. Douglas fir (Coastal) and select white pine (Western) came from the Washington mill and southern yellow pine came from Mississippi mill.

Sears

“Remember, a guarantee is worth only what is behind it. Sears, Roebuck and Co. stand back of this guarantee.” Sears was always ready to serve their current customers and any potential customers.

Sears was always looking to expand and attract more customers. The company strove to be the best and show up their biggest rival, Montgomery Ward. Wards never really had a chance, however against Sears in the area of pre-cut buildings.

The earliest barns located were three barns shown in the 1910 *Book of Modern Homes* and four barn models in the 1911 catalog. For the least expensive barn, Barn No. 11, the specifications state: "For $365.00 we will furnish all the material to build this Barn, consisting of Lumber, Shingles, Framing Timbers, Plank Flooring, Sash, Hardware and Paint." Sears apparently offered this barn only in one size, 46 feet long by 26 feet wide with the floor plan already laid out. There is no mention of any particular framing method used. The buyer could save $33.00 by choosing "3 ½-Ply Flint Surfaced Asphalt Roofing" or "3 ½-Ply Best-of-all Roofing which will last fully as long as shingles." The buyer could chose the color of the paint. In contrast, Barn No. 14 is the jack-of-all-trades barn at 70 feet by 40 feet and designed to stable sheep, horses, and cattle plus plenty of room for feed, and housing for wagons. This was the most expensive barn at $769 and included hay carrier, track and rope.

An advertisement from about 1910, "Build Your Barn Now on Easy Payments," listed special prices in addition to easy payments. New payment terms allowed the buyer to pay monthly, every three months, or every six months. Sears charged six percent interest. The ad shows a large sun-like symbol with spikes or rays highlighting a barn or farm building with monthly payments. The middle of the sun-like symbol appeared a view of the Chicago plant with a classically dressed woman holding a balanced scale and the words "The Homes of Honor-Bilt Houses Where Six Million People Always Get a Square Deal." This ad encouraged the customer to pick out the building that they wanted, in the size needed, fill out the information blank, and arrange for payments over five years. Sears stressed: "We guarantee complete satisfaction and safe delivery." Orders came with the stated materials numbered to correspond to the detailed plans. The back of the ad shows "Barn Building Made Easy." The advertisement highlights H. A. Robers of Lyons, Wisconsin, erecting his barn, and with information concerning with how long it took to assemble the barn. There was also shown a large gothic barn assembled at Maple Lane Farm in Indiana with a testimonial from George Kircher, manager. The lower half of the ad shows built barns and quotes from satisfied customers.

In the 1918 *Book of Barns* catalog, the general specifications shown on two pages with illustrated cross sections of the braced rafter and trussed roof construction with highlighted details. No specifications were listed for the gothic barn offered. Sears uses the United States Department of Agriculture as an authority for the best materials for barn construction. In bold type were the basic lumber components spelled out: "Barn Frame – Yellow Pine, outside walls – Cypress, "The Wood Eternal" with two grades select and No. 1 common available, mow flooring – tongued and grooved No. 1 Yellow Pine and Fire-Chief Shingle Roll Roofing guaranteed by us for fifteen years for wear and color." For a full description of other items, the buyer was directed to other pages. Optional items such as ventilators, cupolas, and barn equipment all varied due to the individual farming situations so they were not included in the prices.

The 1921 *Book of Barns* catalog, offers "Eight Good Reasons Why You Should Buy Sears, Roebuck and Co.'s 'Already Cut' Modern Farm Buildings":

1. Our farm buildings are constructed scientifically. They combine the good features of the best farm buildings in use now.
2. Our farm buildings are designed according to the latest requirements of sanitation and convenience.
3. For every farm building the framing material is already cut and fitted. This prevents waste of material and reduces the labor about one-half. In addition, all doors are "ready made, ready to hang in lace, making doors superior to those produced by hand carpentry.
4. Any handy man can erect our "already cut" modern farm buildings according to our plans. This saves a considerable amount of expert labor.
5. You have our guarantee that at the prices shown in this catalog we furnish enough material to complete the farm building. You will not be required to buy extra material.
6. We guarantee that material to be equal to or better than the grades specified in our general specifications.
7. When you deal with us you have the assurance that you are not paying for an experiment. We were the first to develop the mail order system to sell complete building materials. We have had many years of experience in this line. Our buildings are not experimental, but, having been built

many times, have proved correct and practical in every detail.

8. You can buy any buildings in this book costing $500.00 or more on easy payments. For particulars see the Order Blank.

The specifications for the barns in the 1921 catalog were identical to the 1918 catalog. The specifications are listed as sidebars to the cross sections illustrating the braced rafter and trussed roof construction. The gothic roof barns are featured in the catalog but no cross section or detailed specifications are available. The Modern "Pioneer" Barn No. 3008 "Already Cut" and Fit is also featured and looks to be a modern timber frame barn but no details are available other than all framing materials are No. 1 yellow pine.

In the 1923 *Modern Farm Buildings* catalog, the general specifications listed across the bottom of all four framed illustrations showing examples of braced rafter, trussed, gothic, and timber frame construction with details highlighted. Bold type for visual scanning complimented all four pages. The basic lumber components are the same as the 1918 catalog with the exception of the roll roofing guaranteed for seventeen years instead of fifteen. The pages are somewhat hard to read due to all the information. The first barn model displayed, supposedly the best seller, is "Our Leader," Modern General Purpose Barn No. 2061. For $655.00, this gothic barn came with "framing lumber, siding, outside finish lumber, mow flooring, roof sheathing, roofing, factory made doors and windows, paint, hardware, nails, bolts and complete working plans." The least expensive siding was "medium" grade yellow pine, and the quote was for the smallest barn offered at 24 feet by 24 feet. "Secero Brand Barn Paint" in Oxide Red was the standard paint unless the customer requested another color. Other available colors were French Gray, Yellow, and Maroon. The "Fire-Chief" roll roofing furnished was a long felt roll covered in crushed slate with black asphalt patterned to mimic individual shingles. A less expensive alternative was the "Oriental Slate Surfaced Roofing" which came in long felt rolls covered in crushed slate and asphalt but with no patterning. Two colors were available for the roll roofing: red and sea green. Galvanized nails were included in the price.

In the 1928 *Modern Farm Buildings* catalog, the general specifications were listed on the pages preceding the three pages of framing methods. The "Honor Bilt" specifications were listed on the sidebar of each of the cross sections illustrating the framing methods used in the construction of the barns. The specifications are in very small type in limited space making it difficult to read. A description about the framing methods and their features acclaimed on the lower half of the page. The next page deals with the "Better Built Doors" and "High Grade Barn Sash and Frames" with illustrations and descriptions of the quality construction. The next page is entitled "ABOUT OUR BARN SIDING." There are two grades of siding offered: medium grade with some knots and best grade that was clear cypress. Both grades are illustrated. Close-ups provided of both types of tongue and groove siding offered: drop siding and double V siding. On the bottom of the page, there is an endnote that states "Barn Boards and Battens furnished, if desired, for all vertical sided buildings."

"Our Leader" Modern Barn No. 2061 leads off the cover of the 1928 catalog like all the other barn catalogs and was the first barn model displayed inside the catalog (Illustration 20). The price listed as $939 for this barn, 30 feet by 32 feet, already cut and fitted and included all the same components offered in the 1923 catalog. "Honor Bilt" specifications were below each barn illustration. Standard house paint, in varying color combinations in a separate paint catalog, was included. Sears had changed their selling strategy to a modern "Build Your Barn Like a Skyscraper" with a comparison of the steel skeleton skyscrapers to the wooden frame skeleton barns.

Chicago House Wrecking Company / Harris Brothers Company

By 1910, Chicago House Wrecking Company began offering building plans in addition to their already successful millwork and lumber business. In their 1910 *Book of Plans*, the buyer could look through the catalog and pick the building that he/she wanted and complete blue print plans; specifications and bill of materials sent for a fee of $2.00. The fee was applied to the bill if the consumer chose that particular design and ordered the materials. "All quotations in this book are made net cash F.O.B. Cars Chicago." Because of prevailing market conditions, the potential buyer had to write the company for a price quote on the exact design delivered to the station or drop off point. The company kept their own experienced architects on staff to draft the plans for the catalog. Because the actual cost was "$25.00 to $100.00 per set," so the $2.00 fee per set was really a selling item to entice the buyer.

The proposed specifications for the barns are located toward the back of the catalog in a

section entitled “Barns.” The only items not furnished was the paint, foundation materials and materials for the arrangement of the interior as this varied widely per farmer and location. Framing and sheathing of 2-inch dimensional Southern Pine was supplied in a sufficient quantity. For barns that employed the joist framing designs, the company supplied No. 1 Arkansas pine 12-inch board with 2 1/2-inch O. G. battens employed as siding. One inch by six-inch Arkansas pine drop or novelty siding covered the barns that employed balloon-type framing method. Quoted prices were based on having “our celebrated 3-ply Rubberized-Galvo roofing.” “Extra Star, A Star or 5 to 2 clear red cedar,” or white cedar shingles were available for an extra cost. If none of these roofing elements was suitable, then galvanized roofing, either flat or corrugated, was available for an additional minimal cost. Sash and window frames were of No. 1 stock and came in “knock-down” form. The materials for the doors were Southern pine and supplied in sufficient quantities to create double-thickness. All hardware and galvanized iron work was supplied for the barn.

The Chicago House Wrecking Company / Harris Brothers Company was the only company found to have dealt with barns in the sectional building trade. The company encouraged total cash remittance with every order to avoid delaying the processing of the order. If paying cash, the buyer would receive a “two per cent [sic]” discount. If the buyer objected to paying the full price in cash, the alternative was to send half of the money with the rest due C.O.D. upon inspection. They also offered export to foreign companies with a twenty percent surcharge. Either payment in full or fifty percent paid with remainder collectable from any designated United States bank was required for foreign orders.

Specifications called for single wall construction composed of three wood components: studding, cross braces and siding. Foundation sills were made of yellow pine. Exterior walls were specified Clear Oregon fir. The barns came painted with one heavy coat of stock paint. No special skills were required for assembly, since the barn came ready to bolt together. Locally available earth, cinders, brick or stone posts / piers or concrete foundation walls were recommended. Flooring was not included in the price but was obtainable for an additional cost. For use as a barn, the building had windows in every panel on one side and every other panel on the opposite side. The buyer could choose the various window arrangements of the front and back elevations. The windows incorporated were the company’s standard garage windows.

The company offered these “General Purpose Buildings” for use as churches, schools, barns, dance halls, and warehouses. The only difference in the design of the general-purpose building when utilized as a barn was the use of five-foot wide wall sections to accommodate stalls. The company offered nine different size single-wall barns ranging from 16 feet 5 inches by 24 feet 5 inches to 24 feet 5 inches by 48 feet 5 inches. Barn prices range from $245 to $784. There was an additional ten percent charge for nine-foot ceilings. If the buyer wanted a different size building or better than single wall construction then he/she had to write to the company for a price quote. Interior arrangements with stalls and partitions were available for additional cost.

Aladdin

The Aladdin Company offered two terms: full cash payment with a five percent discount or twenty-five percent cash with the order; balance C.O.D., due upon inspection. The terms remained constant throughout the catalogs researched.

The specifications for Aladdin Readi-cut barns were simple. All lumber was listed in the sizes supplied for each component. The species of wood was not listed. The buyer could choose prepared roofing or “Extra Star-A-Star” cedar shingles, and the color of paint (enough for two coats). There was also a choice of “perpendicular barn boards or horizontal matched siding.” All windows, doors, and hardware were included. No masonry or foundation materials were supplied, but figures on how much material it should take to complete the job are included in the working plans. Mangers, stalls, and floors were available at an extra cost.

The red cedar siding was covered by the “A-Dollar-A-Knot” guarantee. Siding was guaranteed to be clear and of the highest grade possible. It is not certain if this was the siding for the barns. “The Aladdin Board of Seven” consists of the “Master Designer,” the “Master Builders” and the “Factory Experts.” The board examined each design for flaws and for ways to eliminate waste. Freight costs were low because there was no middleman.

All the companies discussed offered barns of varying sizes and barns for various climates and uses. The author had the opportunity to visit a collection of Sears barns located near Orange, Virginia. On the outside, some changes had been made, such as the metal shingles and silos added. All the

information featured in the catalogs needs critical evaluation because the companies tried to cast themselves in the best light possible. The companies were championing machine-cut lumber as better than hand-cut. Unfortunately, mass production disparages local builders and craftsmen. The author believes that the mail-order companies filled gaps in the barn-building trade in an excellent way with their pre-cut and sectional built kit barns. Exactly how popular were these barns is a question that may never be answered. Mail-order kit barns could be everywhere. However, a better understanding of precisely what these catalog kit-barns were might help them avoid the fate of their hand-constructed counterparts.

COMPARISON OF DESIGNS

Barns do not follow the same high style architectural trends that houses follow. With few exceptions, barns built after 1900 are vernacular in style. Early barns are characterized by their gabled roofs and later by their gambrel roofs. The last great framing method used was the gothic or rainbow roofs. Barns built after World War II increasingly were of the "pole barn" type and are not considered in this research. All the barn designs and options offered by the various companies seem similar to each other because there are a limited number of barn designs using three roof types and on a few suitable wood types.

Montgomery Ward

Montgomery Ward & Co. offered four barn models in the 1916 *Book of Homes*. Three barns had gambrel roofs and the other had a gable roof. All had board and batten siding, four-pane windows, and wooden ventilators. Joist frame construction was the new framing method "rapidly taking the place of the old method of using heavy cross timbers." Besides being more economical and less expansive, it allowed the entire haymow to be unobstructed. The siding on the barns was select 10-inch wide No. 1 cypress boards with joints covered with 2-¼ inch O. G. (sic) battens. All had haymow floors of 6-inch No. 2 yellow pine. All roofs included "Extra Star-A-Star Red Cedars shingles."

The 1917 *Book of Homes* offered only three barn models. Options in 1917 included: two gambrel roofs and one gable roof. The barns did not have numbers or titles but each barn page had a catchy slogan like "Here's A Good Practical Barn" and "Good Cattle Should Have Good Housing." The specifications detailed everything from sills to paint. All lumber was listed per dimensions. Plans were offered in widths of 24, 28, 32, and 36 feet with varying lengths from 24 to 60 feet. All the plans listed with prices for materials both "not-cut" and "frame cut." Any other size barn designed upon request. There were no exposed rafter tails in 1917, and the barns featured metal cupolas or ventilators instead of wooden ventilators.

The 1918 *Book of Homes* offered the exact same three barn models with the same slogans as in the 1917 catalog. All specifications are the same from top to bottom. Stock plans, each with a different number, listed with widths of 24, 28, 32 and 36 feet and lengths available up to 144 feet depending on the barn model. The front of the catalog listed complete prices for frame-cut or not cut. For barns of larger or different sizes, the buyer had to write to the company for a price quote.
The same three barn models with little change appeared again in the 1919 *Book of Homes*. Each barn was available in eight or ten popular sizes. Prices were located on a colored insert in front of page one. This insert was unavailable in the catalog examined. There were still specifications and a description on each page featuring a barn.

Gordon – Van Tine

In the 1917 catalog *Gordon-Van Tine Farm Buildings,* there are nineteen two-story barns offered. The barn designs fall into the following categories: nine gambrels, four gables, one gothic, one combination gambrel barn with gable wings, and two round barns. Each barn design has a number assigned to it. Most of the barns utilize the plank frame trussed framing method that culminates in a gambrel roof shape. The plank frame barn and braced-rafter barn are pictured with specifications on separate pages. The braced-rafter barn looks more like a Shawver-truss according to research done by Soike. Soike explains that the braced-rafter construction was the standard for barns up to thirty-six feet wide. He also suggests that Shawver plank truss was the preferred frame of choice for barns over thirty-six feet wide but under forty-two feet wide. Some of the other barns had a modernized timber frame. The modernized timber frame barn utilized standard lumber bolted together to simulate

dimensional timbers and may have been the framing method of choice for some farmers.

Windows are mainly six-light and nine-light; a few have four-light. All operating windows are equipped with ventilation shields to prevent the wind from blowing directly on the animals. "Gordon Rolling Doors" and "Gordon Dutch Doors" were supplied for all barns. The hay doors were either single drop (the whole door) or double sliding doors.

The undated Gordon-Van Tine catalog features seventeen barns. The categories of barns offered: nine gambrels, four gothics, three gabled, and one round. As in the 1917 catalog, the "Plank Frame Trussed-Roof Style," the "Self-Supporting or Braced Rafter Roof" and the "Gothic Roof Style Construction" are all shown in cross section with details highlighted for both the plank and braced rafter styles. "Gordon-Van Tine Barn No. 434" listed as "An Extra Strong Barn for the Conservative Buyer." It was a gable-roofed barn with a modernized timber frame. This was reflected the fact that the other framing methods were still new, and some farmers wanted use a familiar framing methods that they knew would last. There was a small cross section of the barn illustrated on the page, surrounded with details about the barn. A half-cross-section was included for those barns that do not follow those on the specification pages.

In the 1923 Gordon-Van Tine *Farm Buildings* catalog there are nineteen barns offered. The barn models offered included: eight gambrels, eight gothic, two gabled, and one round. "Plank Frame Trussed-Roof Style," the "Self-Supporting or Braced Rafter Roof" and the "Gothic Roof Style" are all detailed on separate pages with specifications. The Gothic roof exploits "Factory-Built Rainbow Rafters Ready to Raise" that was developed by the company. The gothic roof seems perfected by this time because gothic barns equaled gambrel roof barn numbers. No modernized timber frame barns are available in the 1923 catalog. Self-supporting, balloon frame construction was coming into its fame and now was the sensible method for building a barn.

The "Ready-Made" rolling doors have switched the design of the 1917 doors. The Dutch doors feature an "X" or cross bracing on both top and bottom. A hay door that hinged in the center replaced the single drop hay door . The loft doors are plain.

The 1928 catalog offered eighteen barn models. The breakdown of the designs included: seven gambrel, six gothic, and five gabled barns. The modernized timber frame barn was in demand again because two gabled barns of this framing type were included as in the 1917 catalog. Sample barns were illustrated, one for each framing method, shown in cross-section with details showing sizes of materials used for that particular size barn. Now round barns had fallen out of favor by the late 1920s and were dropped from the catalog.

Because of the nearly identical house models found in both companies' catalogs, Schweitzer and Davis speculate that Montgomery Ward may have used Gordon-Van Tine as a supplier of their barns. It seems more likely that the companies followed the trends of their contemporaries and tastes of the public.

Aladdin

The Aladdin Company was offering barns as early as 1915, but the earliest verified example is in the 1917 catalog. "Aladdin Readi-Cut Barns" featured in a two-page spread, which offered three designs in the 1917 *Aladdin Homes* catalog. The barns featured were straightforward. There was the "Aladdin Special Barn," the gable barn and the gambrel barn. The "Aladdin Special Barn," designed to house three horses and a wagon, was only available in one size, 16 feet by 24 feet for $290, but with the 5% discount, a buyer could obtain this barn for $275.50. The gable and the gambrel barns were available in sizes from 16 feet by 24 feet to 30 feet by 100 feet. Net cash prices list for the gable and gambrel barns together by size, with the first and second floor and stall with the manger being an extra $5.50.

Aladdin "Readi-cut barns" of the same three designs appear in the 1918 *Aladdin Homes* catalog. This "Special Barn" was now available for $375. The prices are listed net cash (no floors), first floor extra, second floor extra, and with stall and manger was available for an extra $7. No information was available on the framing methods used in any of the designs. These barns were strictly for horses or storage only. The windows were very small and were not suitable for a dairy operation. "These barns have given the greatest satisfaction and service on the western plains of Nebraska and Kansas," the catalog states, "where they are subjected to the heaviest strains of wind and storms." Perpendicular barn boards or horizontal matched boards were available as siding choices. The doors featured cross braces as designs or were box framed.

There is again little difference in the company's 1919 catalog. Aladdin offered the same three barns in their two-page layout and no price list shown. The specifications and illustrations of each barn are the same. The front few pages show the terms and prices. Prices jumped considerably following 1918 after the end of World War I. The "Special Barn" costs the buyer $590.90. The 1919 prices list as gross price, net price, extra first floor, and extra second floor. The stall with manger was now an extra $10.97.

Sears

Sears was the most popular of all the companies and was well-known for selling houses. From the start, Sears offered barns alongside their houses. The company followed the trends very carefully for all items they sold. Striving to be the best, Sears was a continually changing company that accommodated the customers' needs and desires. Richard W. Sears died in 1909, before the climax of pre-cut kit buildings era. The merchandising creed of Julius Rosenwald, now managing head of Sears was "sell honest merchandise for less money and more people will buy." In stating this, the company also believed in maintaining the quality of all the merchandise. Sears claimed to be the "World's Largest Store" and until mid-twentieth century was definitely a leader in the retail sales world.

Sears started offering barns in their 1910 *Book of Modern Homes*. The company had three barn models, ranging from an inexpensive 26 feet by 46 feet, English-style gable Barn No. 11, for $365, to the more expensive Barn No. 12 for $522, up to Barn No. 14 for $769. The other two barns had the popular gambrel roof style. Notable is all barn models featured wooden ventilators (metal ventilators would appear in later catalogs). In the 1911 catalog, not much had changed expect there were four barn models that ranged from the Barn No. 11, for $377 to Barn No. 14 which was a 40 feet by 70 feet steep-pitch gable roof barn, with a 14 feet by 40 feet sheep stable for $792. There was no mention of the framing methods used.

The octagonal dairy barn, Barn No. 65, appeared as early as 1914 in the catalog information received from the Sears archives. According to Leffingwell, the 1916 catalog introduced, Barn No. 65 that looked exactly like Barn No. C65 from the 1917 Sears catalog. The ad from the 1917 catalog repeats the 1916 edition with the exception of the price of the silo, which is now $199. Sears catalog writers claimed:

> This is an octagon barn of first class construction and is becoming very popular throughout the country. Our floor plans afford an economical arrangement. There are stalls for twenty-four cows, a box stall, calf pens and room for a silo in the center. We will furnish the material for the silo for $157.00 extra. This silo will be large enough to hold feed for the entire season. The arrangement of the stalls makes it very convenient for feeding and for cleaning.... A glance at the floor plans will show the convenient access to the barn on different sides by means of swinging doors. A large driveway with doors being wide enough to admit a full load of hay permits filling from the inside. There is a large hay loft on the second floor and a grain bin of medium size for feed. Twenty-three windows admit plenty of light.

The 1918 *Book of Barns Honor-Bilt Already Cut* had this opening statement:

> During our study of barn building, we have carefully analyzed the methods of the builders and the requirements of the owners. We learned that three different types of construction are very popular---the Braced Rafter Construction or, as it is sometimes called, the Balloon Construction; the Trussed Roof Construction and the Gothic Roof Construction. The popularity of these types of construction is so great that we did not feel warranted in omitting any of them.

The 1918 *Book of Barns* offered twenty-six barns. The examples showed the broad range that Sears covered that year: thirteen gambrels, three gothic, three gables, three bank barns and three small barns which highlight each framing method offered, one round, and the octagonal dairy barn mentioned above. There was at least one metal ventilator featured on all barns but was not included in the price. Exceptions to this were the round and octagonal barns that had modified wooden ventilators in keeping with the character of the barns. The larger barns featured single nine-light or six-light windows paired on the first floor and both had six light windows in the haymow level. The smaller barns, the round and octagonal barns all featured four-light windows. All first floor doors offered were paired roller type or

Dutch doors. The haymow doors were all cross-braced doors. The doors on the round barn were the standard straight doors offered for the other barns.

The 1921 *The Book of Barns Honor-Bilt-Already Cut* catalog offers twenty-two barns. The breakdown of barn models included: twelve gambrels, two gothics, five gables, the same three small barns as the 1918 catalog, three bank barns offered in three different framing methods and the same round barn featured in the 1918 catalog. The only real change between the catalogs was the prices and the dropping of the octagonal barn. Even though gothic barns and the modernized timber barns are offered, only the braced rafter and trussed roof construction are featured in cross section with details.

The 1923 catalog, *Modern Farm Buildings Already Cut and Fitted Barn Equipment,* offered fourteen barn models and barn equipment in the same catalog. The breakdown of the barn models included: three gothic, seven gambrels, two gables, and two small barns, one with gothic roof and the other with a gabled roof. All four framing methods were represented: braced rafter, trussed, gothic, and timber. The "Honor-Bilt" specifications continue across all four pages, illustrating cross sections of the four framing methods. The 1928 *Modern Farm Buildings* catalog offered a few more examples for a total of seventeen barn models. The breakdown of the barn models that year included: nine gambrels, three gothics, three gables, and small barns. The same framing methods offered as in the 1923 catalog, although only the trussed, braced, and gothic framing methods were illustrated. The only real changes observed were the prices were not listed in the 1929 catalog, customers were required to write to the company to obtain a price quote on a particular barn in a certain size.

Chicago House Wrecking Company / Harris Brothers Company

The Chicago House Wrecking Company offered six large two-story barns and three small gabled barns in their 1910 *Book of Plans*. All barns used the balloon-type framing or "Joist Frame Construction." All the barns were given names such as "Star," "Majestic" and "Premium". Individual numbers designated the specific sizes. The smaller barns intended for city or suburban use where a few horses and accommodations for feed and carriages was necessary. Prices ranged from "Our Universal Barn Design No. 45," 16 feet by 24 feet for $178, to the "Majestic Barn Design," 36 feet by 112 feet for $975. It is the individual farmer's choice to select from all offered floor arrangements. Some of the barns had stable partitions included in the price while others did not. Wooden ventilators were featured on almost all the barns and included in the price (but were not mentioned in the specifications). Flooring is included for all barns. Because everything was included in the price, these nonpre-cut were still classified as kits.

Between 1910 and 1919, the company made a dramatic shift to sectional buildings, using a new name. According to the patent date, Harris Brothers, with a new name and new product line began offering buildings (as early as 1918) called "Presto-Up." "Presto-Up Patented Bolt-Together Houses-Garages-Barns Etc." were based on this new method of construction. The company offered "General Purpose Buildings." Their barns were now portable, unlike any other kits offered. The company offered nine different size single wall constructed barns. All the roofs of the general-purpose buildings are the same shallow gabled configuration in varying widths.

The location of the windows and doors was ultimately up to the farmer. Their standard "garage" windows were "furnished in every section on one side and in practically every other section on the opposite." "Style B" was the only door choice offered. The individual decided the configuration of the front and back elevations. A sample floor plan shown with stalls made it more suitable as a horse barn.

Barns are not one-of-a-kind architect designed products. So that they could be mass-produced, that barn and farm buildings offered by the various mail-order companies were planned down to the last nail. Today, the only places where new hand-made post and beam barns are found are Amish communities. There are a limited number of framing methods, siding, fenestration, doors, roofing material and barn types. The width of the barn was decided by current agricultural practices for the proper configuration. The companies may have wanted to be different but they were limited to these variables. Varieties of wood, colors, and quality of paint differed, but overall the variables compute to the same overall designs.

CONCLUSION

The farms and barns of the twentieth century are a combination of styles and materials that have been adapted over time to meet particular needs; this fusion of elements makes them hard to date.

The framers encountered much the same conditions and had to adapt to evolving technologies and ever-changing times. The wood-frame barns from the early twentieth century seem destined not to exist in the current environment of metal pole barns, large round bales, and large-scale agri-business that has engulfed farming communities. Barns and family farms seem fated to become forgotten aspects of society. Old barns transformed into rustic wood paneling for someone's family room or new homes lose their context and become barn byproducts. The future of wood-frame barns is questionable, but the purpose of this thesis has been to preserve some record of pre-cut mail-order kit barns from the first two decades of the twentieth century.

It is difficult to answer all the questions posed by this research. Many years, even decades, have passed since some of these companies were in business; and hence records have been lost, and details about the mail-order buildings have become unobtainable. The manufacturers' trade catalogs and the periodicals that the manufacturers published were dispensable in years past and thus not saved. However, in the early 1980s when mail-order homes, especially those by Sears, gained attention and press, there was a renewed interest. Now these very catalogs have become valuable and can sell for a minimum of twenty dollars, and often more, depending on their condition.

Perhaps no one will ever know how many barns the companies discussed here produced. The discarded records for Sears, Gordon-Van Tine, and Ward are lost forever; thus no real numbers or location of buildings sold exist. For Aladdin, however, it may be possible to determine barn numbers and find locations because the company closed only about twenty years ago, and the company records are now in the archives of Michigan State University. So far, they have not been processed, but they may be available for review at a future date.

A review of all the catalogs reveals that the barn designs were not especially innovative but became standardized as functional requirements, mass production, and costs dictated. All the barns followed three standard roof types: gable, gambrel, and gothic. Gable roofs were the first type offered, and being the simplest to build, are normally the oldest. Gambrel roofs soon replaced gable roofs in popularity as they increased hay storage capacity. Gothic roofs, once perfected in design and construction, soon caught up in popularity with the gambrel roof barns. Gambrel roofed barns would persevere, however, and were the most common roof type offered. Windows were standardized multi-light and numerous thus allowing the sun, "nature's disinfectant," and air circulation to make barns healthier for the livestock. Doors were all similar in construction with different cross bracing that varied in decoration according to the company. Harris Brothers and their sectional general-purpose barn were built in a drastically different way than the kit barns manufactured by any of the other companies.

The development of the pre-cut barn was dependent or expedited by the adoption of lighter barn-framing techniques. There were no businesses offering pre-cut heavy timber post and beam barns (though there are businesses that sell that type of item now). The quality of wood offered varied but cannot equal the quality or quantity that the mail-order companies used and offered. The lighter-framed barns came into use at the right time. The barn kits saved the farmer money because the lumber was of smaller standard dimension and saved time because he could assemble the barn or farm building with much less help compared to the labor-intensive mortise and tendon building technique.

There do not appear to be any significant trends in designs and materials that are identifiable in pre-cut barns from 1900 to 1930. The exceptions are that early barns offered by the companies featured wooden cupolas and later barns featured metal ventilators and barn door cross bracing or decoration can help identify a mail-order barn. Overall, standardization of barn designs and certain varieties of wood needed for the various components of the barns and farm buildings created a pattern repeated throughout the catalogs. Pre-cut barns do not appear to have any distinguishing physical characteristics that identify being pre-cut. Since pre-cut building designs are not necessarily innovative, they followed the current agricultural trends which makes these designs similar to designs shown in the agricultural press and literature.

To discover if a barn or farm building is possibly a mail-order building involves some investigation of the building (perhaps from a crowbar) and a good deal of research. The property owner or researcher should first take a few representative photographs of the barn. To possibly identify a barn or farm building as a mail-order building:

1.) Check for numbers or letters written or stamped on joists, rafters, or other wood members in the barn.

A.) Two methods of labeling were used.

i.) Aladdin marked their lumber by lengths.

ii.) Other companies, such as Sears, stamped or imprinted a code on the ends of the lumber that corresponded to the working plans.

2.) Check hardware and equipment for markings, but this is not always reliable as many companies also sold hardware and / or equipment separately.

3.) Check for original documentation such as blueprints, working plans, shipping slips, etc. if available from present owners or former owners.

4.) Scan published catalogs to determine if the standing barn or farm building matches or resembles the illustrations present.

The main investigation method that the author utilizes is the comparison of barn photographs to the actual published catalog and the one that is recommended. If original documentation is not available, then investigators may find it difficult to prove that the barn or farm building is a mail-order or catalog building. Companies, such as Sears, did not keep records of people who purchased their buildings, so individual owners will have to inform the researcher which company they think built or sold a particular building. With this study of the mail-order kit barns in the Midwest from 1900 to 1930, several objectives were accomplished. First, a historical overview of the mail-order companies that provided barn plans and mail-order barns was created. Second, the documentation of the variety of designs and plans in illustrations, drawings and text, was compiled. Third, comparing and contrasting the barn designs and plans of the various companies took place. Although the author had hoped to determine the actual extant of the pre-cut barn's popularity, conclusive data on this proved most difficult to locate.

Pre-cut mail-order kit barns dating from the first two decades of the twentieth century illustrate the modernization and standardization of the barn as a functional building. These kit barns are significant in the areas of architecture and agriculture. Barns that reflect agricultural practices during this period may well meet Criterion A of the National Register. Barns that are associated with the lives of people, particularly if the individual's contributions were significant within the context of agriculture, may meet Criterion B of the National Register. Barns that retain enough characteristics to be considered as representative of a property type may meet Criterion C of the National Register. Once a barn is determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the barn may be eligible for tax incentives on the federal, state and, possibly, local level. A twenty percent federal rehabilitation tax credit is available for certified rehabilitation of buildings listed on, or eligible for, the National Register of Historic Places. To qualify, a building must be income-producing, and the rehabilitation costs must be greater than $5,000 or the adjusted cost basis for the building. Several states offer property tax relief for the certified rehabilitation of historic buildings, which may consist of freezing property taxes at the pre-rehabilitation level or an exemption for a specific period. In addition, some states offer state income tax credits for rehabilitation and a few localities have grant or loan programs for preservation. Contact your State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) for information on these programs and restoration / rehabilitation guidance. Technical advice is also available through the National Trust for Historic Preservation and *Successful Farming* magazine's BARN AGAIN! program. Several states offer their own statewide barn preservation programs, so check with your SHPO for the availability of workshops or other assistance.

For further information on preserving barns, check out *Taking Care of Your Old Barn: Ten Tips for Preserving and Reusing Vermont's Historic Agricultural Buildings*, the National Park Service's, *Preservation Brief 20*, "The Preservation of Historic Barns," and Dexter Johnson's *Using Old Farm Buildings*. The BARN AGAIN! program also publishes the *Barn Aid Series* that offers helpful information on barn preservation from the foundation to the roof. Mary Humstone's *BARN AGAIN!: A Guide to the Rehabilitation of Older Farm Buildings* and *BARN AGAIN! Barn Preservation Information Handbook: A Guide for Individuals and Organizations* are also excellent references.

On the 2,700-acre Montpelier estate in Orange County, Virginia, are four Sears mail-order barns. William duPont and his family purchased Montpelier, President James Madison's home, in 1901, the duPonts made many modifications and improvements to the estate over the years. Mr. and Mrs. William duPont passed away during the late 1920s, thus leaving the estate to their daughter, Marion, who made it her lifelong home. "Marion developed Montpelier as one of the nation's leading horse training centers…" In the creation of this top-notch horse training facility, Marion bought four Sears barns between 1929 and 1931, erecting the barns with her own building crew headed by Mitchell

Jackson. She owned a number of famous Virginia racehorses, including Battleship, who won both the British and American Grand National Steeplechases, and Mongo, who won more than $800,000 in race purses. In the 1920s, she founded the celebrated Montpelier Races, still held each November at Montpelier. The National Trust for Historic Preservation was transferred ownership of the property after Marion's death in 1984. A private foundation, The Montpelier Foundation, took over administration of the estate in October 2000. With the estate open to the public and the Trust's ownership, the barns, used for horse stables and educational purposes, are safe.

The Sears barns on the Montpelier estate are near the Sears mail-order barns also located in Orange County, Virginia, that had appeared in the book entitled *The American Barn*. The visit to these barns was overwhelming. The five Sears, Roebuck and Company barns stood on property previously owned by a Sears heir. The Honorable Helen Marie Taylor, as part of her vast farm in the Shenandoah Valley, has accumulated part of the original 13,500-acre land grant from King George II. She renovated and restored the five mail-order barns on her 11,000 acres of rolling farmland named Meadowfarm. Meadowfarm has been in the family over 270 years. The National Trust recognized Mrs. Taylor and her barns in 1988 for the Trust's and *Successful Farming* magazine's BARN AGAIN! awards project. Pre-cut kit barns still exist today but in a much different context. Today specialized companies and not large mail-order catalog companies sell them. The materials have changed according to the times and technology. For instance, No. 1 grade wood is no longer used; composite wood products such as Oriented Strand Board (OSB) and T-1-11 are provided instead. The pre-cut kit barns of today are usually on a smaller scale, and are mostly multi-purpose backyard barns or shelters for lawnmowers, rakes, and garden hoses.

Despite picturesque barn scenes immortalized on calendars, posters and advertisements on television and in magazines, farms and barns are still rapidly lost to neglect and suburbanization across the nation. "Barns, like our friends, are often taken for granted until they are gone." Not every wood-frame barn can or will be saved by any means, but over the last twenty years barn preservation and rehabilitation has come to the forefront to save quite a few examples of our once agrarian society. The wood-frame barns of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were built to last for generations. Unfortunately, the homogenized pole barn structures built since the 1950s, with their framing poles set in the ground and metal sheets attached to this pole frame, have a life expectancy of less than fifty years. It is doubtful that society will immortalize these pole barns in paintings, calendars, and posters; as a nation, we have divorced ourselves from any romantic or nostalgic feelings for these utilitarian structures.

About the author:

Joy Sears – Restoration Specialist, HCP, OPRD

Joy serves as the Restoration Specialist for the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) that is under the Heritage Conservation Programs in the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. Prior to joining the Oregon SHPO, she served as the Restoration Specialist for the South Dakota SHPO for five years dealing with technical advising for historic buildings and tax incentives for historic preservation. She received her masters in Historic Preservation from the University of Oregon in 2001. Before moving to South Dakota, she spent a year-and-a-half doing preservation carpentry on Villard Hall, a National Historic Landmark, on the University of Oregon campus. She received her undergraduate in fine arts with a minor in American Studies with an emphasis in Heritage Preservation in her native Minnesota that directed her to the historic preservation fieldwork.