

48th ANNUAL

Alton

Historic House Tour
2020

Featuring

Kit Homes

by Sears, Roebuck & Co.
Montgomery Ward, Lewis
and Gordon Van Tine.



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Alton Area Landmarks Association
altonlandmarks.org

THIS IS A DRIVE-BY TOUR ONLY
You can not go into the homes. Being a guest
on this tour does not give you permission
to go onto any of the properties.
Please, do not bother the homeowners.

Alton has a well-deserved reputation for being a historically significant river city, but did you know that it's also home to an impressive collection of more than 40 kit homes? In the early 1900s, you could order almost anything out of the Sears Roebuck mail-order catalog, including entire houses. These "kit homes" were shipped via boxcar, and the 12,000-piece kits came with a 75-page instruction book and a promise that a "man of average abilities" could have the house assembled in less than 90 days.

It was homeowner's responsibility to transport the building materials from the train depot (where the boxcar had been moved to a siding) to the building site, which is why kit homes are typically found within 1-2 miles of train tracks.

While Sears kit homes are the most widely known, there were six other companies selling kit homes on a national level, including Gordon Van Tine (based in Davenport, Iowa), Lewis Manufacturing and Aladdin Homes (Bay City, Michigan), Montgomery Ward (which turned to Gordon Van Tine to fulfill the orders), Sterling Homes, Harris Brothers (Chicago) and Sears (also Chicago).

And Alton has examples from each of those companies, which is remarkable!

We've selected some of our favorites for this year's tour, but these are just a few examples of the significant architecture that this old river city has to offer. Enjoy the tour, and please share the links with your friends on social media.

*List compiled by Rosemary Thornton, www.searshomes.org





*1830 Liberty St.
Montgomery Ward
106*

First offered in the early 1910s, Wardway House #106 was surprisingly modern with a first-floor bedroom, a second-floor master bedroom with his and her closets (on opposing sides of the room), and a spacious L-shaped pantry in the 140-square-foot kitchen. Fancier than many Wardway Homes, Model #106 featured leaded argyle glass in doors and windows on the first floor rooms (exclusive of the kitchen). In the 1916 catalog, the cost was \$1,064.



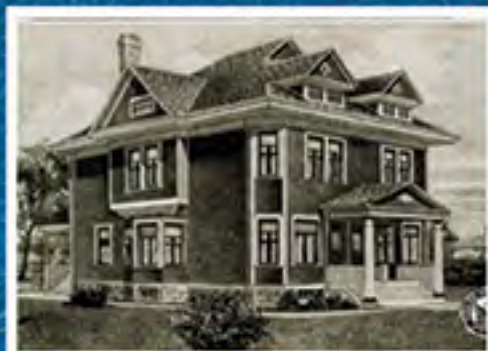
*815 Douglas Street
Sears Modern Home
118*

Pre-World War One kit homes are extremely rare, and the oversized kit homes are also hard to find, and yet Sears Modern Home #118 at 815 Douglas Avenue checks both those boxes! Originally owned by the Springman Family (of Springman Lumber in Alton, IL), Sears Modern Home #118 has almost 3,000 square feet. A recent inspection of the home's interior revealed that both millwork and framing lumber was probably obtained locally, and not from Sears.



*1809 State Street
Gordon Van Tine
605*

If you've lived in Alton for any amount of time, you've probably noticed this impressive Craftsman-influenced home at 1809 State Street. The dramatic asymmetrical front and oversized clipped-gable dormer are distinctive features of Model #605, offered by Gordon Van Tine (Davenport, Iowa). Offered in the 1920s and early 1930s, there are three #605s in Alton, and each are in good condition. Gordon Van Tine offered more than 100 designs during their 30+ years in the kit home business, but #605 was one of their fancier models.



*440 / 442
East 6th Street
Sears Lakeland*

This fourplex on 6th Street was originally built as a side-by-side duplex, and arrived at this site as a tall stack of building materials from the Sears Roebuck catalog. It was promoted as a "cozy double house for two families," but in fact it boasts almost 1500 square feet per side (as built). Inside, you'd find plate rail moulding throughout the dining room, leaded-glass windows in the living room, and hexagonal ceramic tile on the bathroom floor, predominantly white with blue accent tiles. The original owner paid \$3,144 for this house in the 1910s or 1920s.



*1859 Evergreen St.
Sears Marina*

The Marina was a popular model for Sears, because it was small (24x25) and yet offered several appealing features, such as a beamed ceiling in the dining room, an oversized living room (24x12), and walk-in closets in the two bedrooms. Upstairs, the lone bathroom was situated within that front gabled dormer (with its large window). The two smaller windows flanking the large window provided light to the closets. In remodels, you'll often see these smaller windows closed-in but fortunately, the subject house is in mostly original condition.



*1907 Park Ave.
Lewis La Veta*

Lewis Homes (Bay City, Michigan) was one of six companies selling mail-order kit homes on a national level. The La Veta was one of their more modest designs, with about 800 square feet total (both floors combined). The catalog proclaimed that it had "an abundance of closet space" which consisted of cramped, dark spaces tucked under the second-floor eaves, and not so much as a single cabinet or closet on the first floor. The lone bathroom measured a mere six feet square.



*2317 State Street
Sears Clyde*

First offered in the late 1910s, the Sears Clyde at 2317 State Street is close (if not beyond) its 100th birthday. In that time, it has been through significant remodelings. And therein lies one of the challenges of identifying these old kit homes - remodeling and improvements. If you study the original catalog image and compare it to the subject house, you'll see a Sears Clyde lurking under those modern accoutrements. At the height of its popularity (late 1920s), the Clyde was offered in three floorplans, with varying widths and lengths.



*2334 Mound Street
Montgomery Ward
Wardway Patrician*

In the late 1920s, Neo-Tudors became very popular throughout the country, and that was also true in the kit-house business! The Newport on Mound Street is an example of a Montgomery Ward kit home (known as "Wardway Homes") and was very similar to a Neo-Tudor offered by Sears known as The Mitchell. The Sears Mitchell has an arched front door, while the Wardway Newport has a squared door with a faux arch above. You'll note that the chimney (as shown in the Wardway catalog) is flared, and not identical to the chimney on the Alton house. Due to weight, masonry was not included in the kit, and it's normal to see variations in chimney design.



*3410 Lincoln Street
Sears Wilmore*

The Sears Wilmore, as built, had cedar shingles on the exterior, with cypress on all exposed wood trim. Both cedar and cypress have a well-earned reputation in construction because they're oily, and thus naturally resistant to rot, decay and insect infestation. The downside is, cedar and cypress need special attention when paint is applied. In these modern times, house painting has become a lost art, and because of this, the majority of Wilmore's throughout the Midwest have been covered in substitute sidings and aluminum trim. One of the reasons that the Wilmore was so popular was because of its expandable attic, which had space for two bedrooms. An optional permanent staircase could be added, which was located at the far side of the dining room wall.



*3636
Berkeley Ave.
Sears Roseberry*

The Sears Roseberry was offered from 1916 to 1923, but city records indicate that this house was built in 1943. There's a local legend that this Sears House on Berkeley was moved to that site from another location in the 1940s. The Roseberry featured beamed ceilings in both the living room and dining room, and a full-width front porch (16 feet). This subject house has a larger footprint than the Roseberry shown in the Sears catalog. About 30% of Sears Homes were customized when built, and the most common alteration was an increase in square footage.

*Other Alton Area
Kit Homes to Explore*

- 2438 Mills Avenue- Sears Elmhurst Sunbeam
- 1617 Clawson Street- Sears Starlight
- 2301 La Salle Drive- Sears Loraine
- 2319 State Street- Sears Clyde
- 615-613 Forest Avenue- Sears Windermere
- 1216 Brown Street- Sears Crescent
- 1714 Worden Avenue- Gordon Van Tine #605
- 1503 South Rogers Avenue- Sears Parkridge
- 320 Deneen Street- Sears Hudson

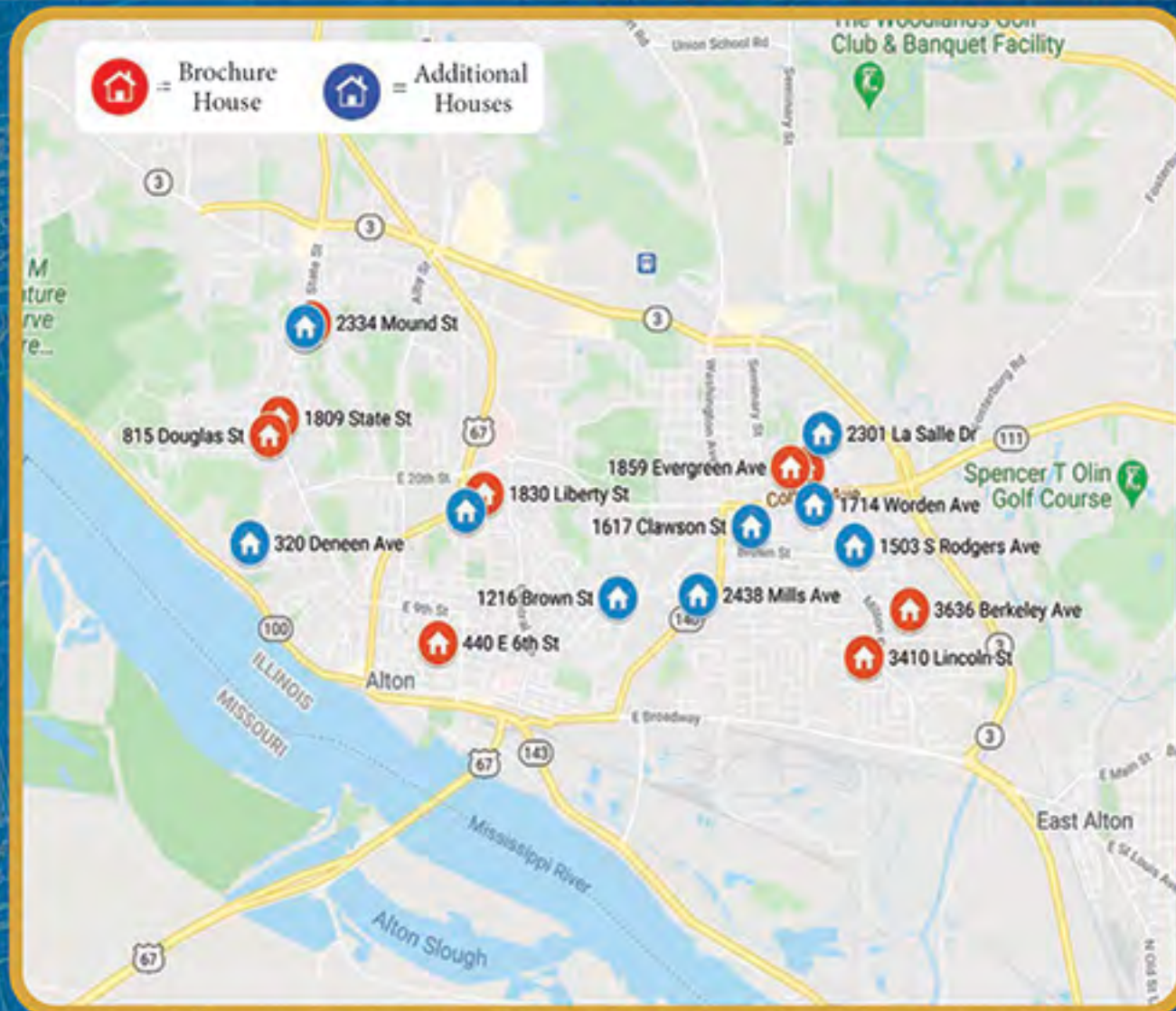
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