

REBECCA HUNTER ON CATALOG HOMES

The rapid westward expansion of the United States in the early twentieth century set the stage for a new industry: mail-order homes. Sold by such companies as Sears, Roebuck & Co., Aladdin, and Montgomery Ward, these kit homes were shipped by train to their purchasers in boxcars containing everything required for their construction, whether a vacation cottage, modest bungalow, or two- and-a-half story home. Rebecca Hunter brings to life the history of these charming homes, tens of thousands of which were sold throughout the United States in the early 1900s, and many of which still exist.

Author, researcher and lecturer Rebecca Hunter became fascinated with the phenomenon of mail order homes in 1996, and is currently engaged in the study of kit homes and agricultural buildings marketed from 1906-1982 by nine different companies. Hunter has sought these buildings throughout Illinois, Wisconsin, Michigan and many other states. She has located mail order buildings in over 400 Illinois municipalities and in 29 other states.

Working with the Elgin Illinois Heritage Commission, Hunter located and photo-documented over 300 mail order homes in Elgin. Her books include *Elgin Illinois Sears House Research Project*; *Beyond Sears: Mail Order Homes in Elgin Illinois*; *Putting Sears Homes on the Map*; *Sears, Roebuck Book of Barn*; and *Mail-Order Homes*.

Hunter has spoken at the American Institute of Architects, the Sears Home Owners Association, public libraries throughout the state of Illinois, and at numerous meetings of historical societies, clubs and associations. She was a speaker for the Illinois Humanities Council Speaker's Bureau for ten years. She has done historical architectural consultation for Elgin, West Chicago, Downers Grove, Joliet, Libertyville, Lombard, Berwyn, Crete, St Charles and Springfield, Illinois, as well as Minneapolis and St Paul, Minnesota; Sylvan Lake Michigan; Hartford, Wisconsin; and Anderson, Indiana.

Articles about Hunter and her research have appeared in *The Chicago Tribune*, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Elgin Courier News*, the *Daily Herald*, and numerous local publications. She has served as a consultant for articles in the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal* and *Bungalow Magazine*. Her work was featured in an article in March 2008 *Cottage Living* magazine. Hunter is a recipient of the Elgin IL Mayor's Award for Historical Preservation, Elgin Image Award and the Elgin Illinois Genealogical Society's Heritage Hall of Fame Award.

Hunter is available for consultation about individual houses, for conducting surveys of municipalities, and for presentations, lectures and workshops on mail order buildings, historic preservation, architectural salvage and other topics. An Architectural Historian, Hunter sits on the Elgin, Illinois, Heritage Commission.