

of enlightened administration has come." A still later president, John F. Kennedy, signaled his approval of these beliefs by adopting "the New Frontier" as a slogan for his Administration. And President Lyndon B. Johnson has proclaimed his predecessors "frontier" as only the borderland of the "Great Society." In such programs Frederick Jackson Turner's essay endures today, as part of the public consciousness of the United States.

Richard Warren Sears

Cheapest Supply House on Earth

1894

EDITED BY JOHN E. JEUCK

Mail-order selling and the money-back guaranty are widely identified with Richard Warren Sears, not because the founder of Sears, Roebuck and Company originated either, but because he exploited them most successfully by his compelling advertising copy and his success in achieving enormous catalogue circulations. Motivated initially by a search for profits and prosperity, Sears exhausted himself in a continuing search for the "right proposition," which he defined in terms of a merchandise offering, price, advertising copy, and circulation plan that would generate sales.

Sears sketched out his copy for the cover and the pages of the 1894 mail-order catalogue in the closing days of the Columbian Exposition Year, 1893. Whether he planned and wrote the copy in his sparsely furnished office in Minneapolis' Globe Building, or in a Van Buren Street loft in Chicago, is not clear, since his mail-order company was then operating from both cities—moving finally to Chicago only in January, 1895. Indeed, Sears may have planned his "Book of Bargains" while en route between the two cities—or in the mid-night hours at home or in his hotel. His mail-order business

had become (and long remained) the absorbing interest of his life, second only to his devotion to his family, whose demands appear to have been modest compared to the excitement and the profit of the avalanche of orders which the mails brought in the wake of Sears's advertising efforts.

Separated by great distances from the market he sought to serve, Richard Sears was conscious of the need to promise "satisfaction or your money back," both to overcome the understandable reluctance of customers to buy without comparing merchandise, and to counter the campaigns waged against mail order by local merchants throughout the land. "YOU TAKE NO RISK," Sears spelled out his general guaranty, "... whether you send part or full amounts of cash with your order, as we ALWAYS REFUND MONEY where goods are not found perfectly satisfactory." Lest the distant farmers fail to be satisfied with even that promise, Sears tried further to reassure them by referring his unseen prospects to their neighbors, the express companies, and the Union National Bank of Minneapolis.

The catalogue of 1894 was significant in several respects. It was the largest (322 pages) yet issued; it was the first to make any pretense toward offering a "complete" line of goods; it was only the second catalogue using the new title "Sears, Roebuck and Company," and the earliest to list the new Chicago location. Also the cover of the 1894 catalogue appears to have been the first to be printed in color. Although catalogues were to vary in price to the customer, the company advertised the 1894 catalogue as free for the writing, a practice that Sears later was to adopt as policy. The catalogue was also one of the last to reflect the unfettered personality of Richard Sears. From 1895, catalogues increasingly reflected the expanding size and dignity of the growing corporation and the trend toward "truth in advertising" with more accurate and detailed descriptions of merchandise.



[Cover]

CHEAPEST SUPPLY HOUSE ON EARTH

OUR TRADE REACHES AROUND THE WORLD

SEARS, ROEBUCK AND CO.

Globe Building
149 W. Van Buren
Minneapolis, Minn.
Chicago, Ill.

CONSUMER'S GUIDE

FOR
1894.

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OUR COMBINED CATALOGUE.

PRESERVE THIS BOOK.

IT'S A MONEY SAVER.

TO OUR PATRONS:

Again we come to you, and we honestly believe, with the grandest collection of Bargains ever printed in one volume. *This is a Book of Bargains; a Money Saver for Everyone.* It is not our aim to include in this book and confuse you with a great variety of goods on which we can save you no money, but it has been our aim to include goods on which you can make a great saving. By a comparison of our prices with those of any thoroughly reliable house, you will see at once you can save money on everything you buy from us. It would be useless for us to include in this book a lot of goods at prices which with transportation charges added would cost you as much as you could buy the same article for in your local market. *We have studied to avoid this* by offering you only such goods as we are in a position to buy from the manufacturers direct and in such quantities as enables us to deliver them to you for as little or less money than they would cost your local dealer.

OUR OLD FRIENDS AND PATRONS

Will remember us as originally an *Exclusive Watch House*, and later, *Watches, Diamonds, Jewelry and Silverware*, and we believe we can modestly claim what is universally conceded that we honestly earned and have since maintained the reputation of being *The Largest Watch and Jewelry House in the World* selling goods direct to the consumer. *Our daily average sales of Watches have been over 400, Jewelry and*

The advertising copy reprinted here—cover and pages 3 and 4—comes from the Sears, Roebuck and Company catalogue of 1894.

Silverware in proportion, while in the Diamond business our sales have almost from the very start exceeded that of any firm in America selling direct to the consumer.

WE HAVE ADDED MANY NEW LINES

And we shall hope for the same support in our new departure that has been so liberally accorded us in the past. *We have studied to carefully and honestly represent every article so that when it reaches you, its appearance will almost universally be better than the description we give.*

ABOUT OUR RELIABILITY.

We are authorized and incorporated under the laws of the State of Minnesota, with a cash capital paid in full of \$75,000.00. We refer you to The Union National Bank of Minneapolis, and you are at liberty, if you choose, to send your money to them with instructions not to turn it over to us unless they know us to be perfectly reliable. We refer to any Express Company doing business in Minneapolis or Chicago—Adams, American, United States, Great Northern or Northern Pacific, or you can very likely find people in your own locality who know of us. *Ask your nearest Express Agent about us; most any Express Agent can tell you about us. Every Express Agent in the United States knows of our reputation, as they have delivered our goods, and must, in most cases, know what our customers think of us.*

WHERE WE SELL GOODS.

Almost Everywhere! There isn't a town in the Union where we haven't sold goods, our goods go into every city, town and hamlet in every state, as well as most every country on the globe. *Don't think you live too far away.* Our biggest trade is in Pennsylvania; 2d, New York; 3d, Illinois; 4th, Ohio, and so on, according to the population of the several states. *Distance cuts no figure. We can serve you anywhere, anytime. Freight rates are low. Express rates are low. We have special facilities for Shipping and in many cases special rates.*

WE AIM TO MAKE CUSTOMERS

Of Everyone by treating every customer in such a manner as to insure their always remaining a customer. WE CAN'T

AFFORD TO LOSE A CUSTOMER, and by instructing our employees to treat every customer at a distance exactly as they would like to be treated were they in a customer's place, and rigidly enforcing this rule, we have grown into one of the first institutions of the country and our patrons far and near are talking in our favor and thus adding new customers daily.

WHO WE SELL.

We sell the consumer, by that we mean we deal direct with the party who buys for his own use, thus saving you the middle man's profit. Anyone can buy from us; there is no restriction. Our terms and conditions are the most liberal ever offered. We make it very easy to buy of us.

Read our Terms, Conditions, etc., on next page.

Very truly,

SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO.

Globe Building, Minneapolis, Minn. 149 West Van Buren Street, Chicago, Ill.

ADDRESS US AT EITHER PLACE.

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TERMS, CONDITIONS OF SHIPMENT, ETC.

The terms and conditions of Shipment will usually be found under each description, but in all cases, unless otherwise specified, CASH IN FULL MUST ACCOMPANY YOUR ORDER. We have tried in all cases to make our terms as liberal as possible, and by comparison you will find we offer terms not given by any other house in existence. On account of weight and bulk some goods can not be sent by express or C.O.D., but so far as we can, we send C.O.D., subject to examination to anyone.

OUR WATCHES, DIAMONDS AND JEWELRY we continue sending C.O.D. to any one anywhere, subject to examination. NO MONEY IN ADVANCE. *Prepay all Express Charges on Watches, excepting a few special cheap watches on which we require cash in full and do not pay charges as explained under each description. UNDERSTAND, Diamonds, Watches and Jewelry will be sent to anyone, NO MONEY IN ADVANCE. No other*

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House on Earth handling the fine line we do give such liberal terms.

PIANOS AND ORGANS we will send to anyone and allow TEN DAYS TRIAL FREE, subject to the conditions fully explained in Catalogue pages.

GUNS AND REVOLVERS we will send to anyone anywhere C.O.D., subject to examination, on receipt of 50c to \$3.00 as a guarantee of good faith. For full particulars read GUN PAGES.

HARNESS. We send Harness C.O.D., subject to examination to any one, on receipt of \$1.00 as a Guarantee. For particulars read HARNESS PAGES.

SILVERWARE. Some Silverware we send C.O.D., subject to examination, *No Money in Advance*. For particulars see SILVERWARE PAGES.

CLOTHING. We send Clothing C.O.D., subject to examination on VERY LIBERAL TERMS. For particulars see CLOTHING DEPARTMENT.

BICYCLES. C.O.D.; subject to examination on receipt of ONE DOLLAR.

BABy CARRIAGES. C.O.D., subject to examination on receipt of TWO DOLLARS.

FULL PARTICULARS as to TERMS OF SALE, CONDITION OF SHIPMENT, Etc., will be found under the *General Descriptions throughout this Book*, and in most cases will be found more liberal than is offered by any other concern.

YOU TAKE NO RISK in ordering of us whether you send part or full amount of cash with your order, as we ALWAYS REFUND MONEY where goods are not found perfectly satisfactory.

HOW TO ORDER.

ALWAYS WRITE YOUR ORDERS PLAINLY: Order Everything by Number; Always sign your Name plainly and in full; Always give the Name of your nearest Express Office or Rail-

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road Station to which you wish goods shipped. If goods are to be sent by Express, give Name of Express company, or Name of Railroad company if to be sent by freight. Goods CAN NOT BE SENT BY MAIL C.O.D. Anything to be sent by mail must be paid for in Advance.

IF YOU DON'T FIND WHAT YOU WANT in this Book, write us. We may have the very thing in stock; if we haven't we can no doubt get it for you at a great saving. *Don't hesitate to write us at any time. We are always at your service.*

Your obedient servants,

SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO.,

Globe Building, Minneapolis, Minn. 149 West Van Buren St., Chicago, Ill.

ADDRESS US AT EITHER PLACE.



By the turn of the century, Sears, Roebuck and Company had outstripped Montgomery Ward in sales, and Richard Sears was a rich man. His living standards were modest and his interest in added wealth, though real, had become secondary. The excitement of generating orders sustained his consuming interest in the catalogue until he resigned from the company in 1908. By then it was the largest mail-order business in the world, with sales in 1907 of more than \$50 million. Since that time, when the enterprise was still limited almost entirely to the rural market, Sears, Roebuck and Company has become the world's largest general merchandise house, with sales of some \$5 billion in 1963 made through the catalogue and more than 700 retail stores located in the United States, Canada, Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Costa Rica, Puerto Rico, El Salvador, and Panama.

Excepting the Bible, the Sears catalogue has probably the widest circulation of any book in the world. Currently, the various editions of the big "wish book" number more than 50 million copies annually. It is found not only in households, but in libraries, schools, offices, army camps, and embassies throughout the world—on both sides of the "iron" and "bamboo curtains." The catalogue is one of the best-read titles in USA libraries throughout the world.

The overriding purpose of the catalogue is—and always has been—to sell merchandise. But its side effects have been

impressive. Company president Robert E. Wood observed in the company's 1937 catalogue: "We conceive of this company not only as a great retail organization but as a great public institution as well." General Wood's statement is not extravagant. The catalogue is not only a source book for theater costumes and set designers, but a sharer with Henry Ford's "fin lizzie" in the distinction of forming the substance of much American humor. On the larger stage of international politics, it is reported that President Franklin Roosevelt once remarked that Soviet propaganda might profitably be countered by bombing the Russians with Sears, Roebuck catalogues (*Life Magazine*, Nov. 11, 1957). And the one-time chief of the Associated Press Moscow Bureau, Eddy Gilmore is authority on the assertion that "Two innocent enough articles of American life—the Sears Roebuck catalogue and the phonograph record—are the most powerful pieces of foreign propaganda in Russia. The catalogue comes first" (*Liberty Magazine*, Jan. 18, 1947).

At home, the mail-order catalogue changed the face of retail trade in rural America—and, at a later date, contributed greatly to the establishment of more efficient distribution in the cities as well. Initially, the catalogue served to break down the monopoly of local retailers throughout the land. The extent to which it furnished a standard of prices and values on farms and in villages and hamlets is evident in the enormous editorial attack it received from small-town newspapers during their crusades to defend local merchants against the mail-order business. Perhaps the largest "book burnings" in the United States were the fires made by irate merchants who burned the catalogues in the public square. (A recent echo of the use of the catalogue as an instrument of protest was the 1962 campaign of the National Farmers Organization to persuade midwestern farmers to pile Sears catalogues up in front of Sears stores to protest against the Committee for Economic Development's published report on agricultural policy.)

Launched on the final quarter of its first centennial, the Sears catalogue continues as a standard of value. Catalogue prices are used to construct a "cost of living" index by professional economists. Writing in the fall of 1957, a journalist noted: "Only recently has the catalogue been internationally used as a weapon in the cold war. This spring Radio Free Europe started beaming a series of broadcasts from Munich to Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Rumania and Bulgaria, describing in detail what the American worker is able to buy with his wages. The price of every item in the

Sears catalogue from 'A' (abdominal bands) to 'Z' (zircon rings) is now being beamed behind the Iron Curtain" (*Life Magazine*, Nov. 11, 1957). Having survived numerous attacks by competing merchants, the catalogue has remained an object of study by its competitors.