



# Apple Blossom Times

Since 1975

Spring 2019

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## Spring is in the Air

### From the desk of our President

*It was a wonderful autumn for the society, as we created great new memories from our fall fundraisers. We had good turnouts for the Apple Harvest Festival, Candlelight Tours at the Van Horn Mansion, and our Annual Carol Sing. Thanks to all our society members and volunteers who made these events successful; your hard work was very appreciated! Unfortunately I do not have everyone's names who helped, and thus don't want to single certain people out while appearing to neglect others. Please know your efforts made a big difference in keeping our historical society alive and well!*

*which we hope you enjoy!*

*One last thing: if you appreciate our newsletters, I encourage you to renew your annual membership. They also make great gifts for others! Please check your newsletter address label for current member status.*



*Members up for renewal have asterisks \* at the end of their name. Use the enclosed form, or order online at [newfanehistoricalsociety.com](http://newfanehistoricalsociety.com). Membership is a vital way to support our society, especially during these quieter months.*

*Enjoy the coming spring, and we look forward to writing again in May.*

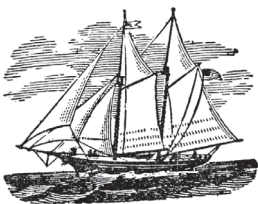
*Vicki Banks  
President*

## Minute History

For a short time Olcott was a known port on water routes at a time when boating was among the fastest ways to travel. Boats and ships of all shapes and sizes passed through Lake Ontario, many in view along Olcott's shoreline. Some stopped for overnight or lengthier visits, allowing locals to find income from boat building, repairs, and boarding passengers.

A number of schooners were built in Olcott, and the following is a partial list of their names and year construction completed:

- Monterey 1847
- Gem 1849
- Conquest 1853
- Governor Hunt 1853
- Ruby 1854
- Joseph Grant 1855
- Corsican 1862



*As our locations are closed for the winter, this edition of our newsletter has additional space to allow for a more extensive historical article,*

## The catalog that changed the world

### The immeasurable effect of the Sears, Roebuck & Co. Catalog

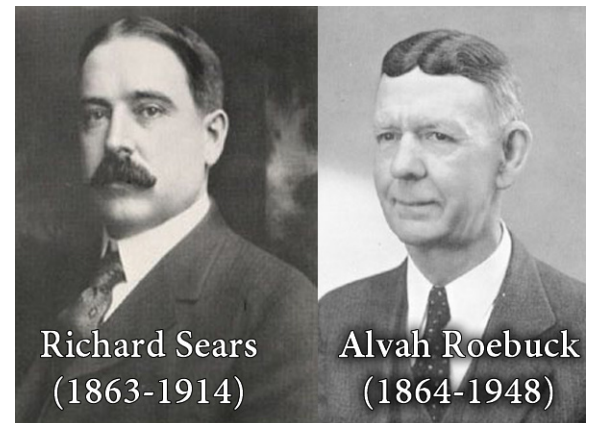
The idea that a sales catalog was as a global-altering achievement may seem like an unusual perspective. Many simply see the Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog as an effective sales tool, or an early form of modern retail. Even more today aren't aware it ever existed. Yet everyone's lives, even now, have been affected by the catalog, which began thanks in part to a wholesale scam forcing retailers to pay for unordered merchandise.

#### A condensed history

In 1886 a jeweler in Minnesota, wise to the scam, denied a shipment of watches he did not order. While awaiting return at the nearby telegraph office, 22-year-old station agent Richard Warren Sears saw the watches as an opportunity to make a good profit, so he purchased them. His charm and sales instincts helped him sell out quickly, allowing him to start his own business, *R. W. Sears Watch Company*. To further boost profits he began direct-to-mail orders using flyers and printed advertisements. Thanks to his innovative writing style of friendly sales pitches, his business was a great success. In 1887, Sears relocated to Chicago and hired his first employee, 23-year-old watch repairman Alvah Curtis Roebuck. Together they created their first catalog to sell watches, jewelry

and diamonds. Sears' methods proved successful, allowing them to sell the business in 1889 for \$100,000 (\$2.8 million today).

Sears and Roebuck remained friends, and in 1892 they returned to the mail order business, forming *Sears, Roebuck & Company*. They created catalogs which offered a wide assortment of products, and focused sales on rural areas without easy access to supplies. By 1894 the catalog grew to 322 pages, and kept expanding as new products were added every year. Among them were...*(continued on page 3)*



**Richard Sears**  
(1863-1914)

**Alvah Roebuck**  
(1864-1948)

# WE ♥ OUR MEMBERS

*This section is an ongoing record of our amazing members.*

Special thanks to the following for their continued support:

- Marvin Croop
- Bruce & Rosemary Garber
- R. Jeanette Hamminga
- Mickie Kramp
- Joanne Popp Lindemann
- Susan Mandaville
- Joseph & Nancy Miller
- Mary Ann Miller
- Rosemary Miller

Welcome to our newest members!

- Susan Pilon
- Beth Wood & Kris Sniffen

## Save the Date!

# 43rd Apple Blossom Festival

**Sunday, May 19th at 10am**

**at our Country Village**

**2685 West Creek Road  
Newfane, NY 14108**



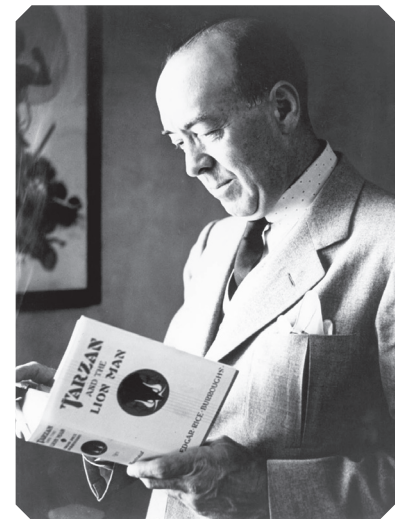
*Free Admission!*

Check out our summer (May) newsletter for details, or visit our website now:

**[NewfaneHistoricalSociety.com](http://NewfaneHistoricalSociety.com)**

## Historical Fun Fact

R.W. Sears famously wrote every line of copy in the early catalogs, but after he retired the task fell to a series of writers. Among them was Edgar Rice Burroughs, who went on to later fame as the creator of Tarzan.



## Find Us At Newfane 365!

**March 21, 6-9pm  
at the Olcott Fire Hall**

The Newfane Tourism Board's annual showcase of the town is nearly here. See displays from local businesses, organizations and events. The evening is free and open to the public. The Newfane Historical Society will be there, so visit our display and pick up our 2019 event calendar listing our yearly events.



## Van Horn Mansion public tours return April 7th

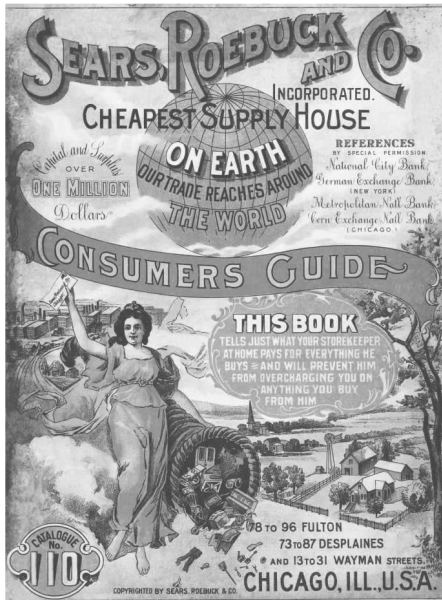
Stop in for a complete guided tour of our living museum, which lasts about 90 minutes. It includes a journey from cellar to attic, covering everything from local history to architecture, along with our resident ghosts! The mansion is open for tours from 1-4pm on Sunday afternoons from April 7th through November 17th (*excluding holidays*). The cost is \$5.00 per person, or free for society members.

We also offer special tours, private rentals and more. Learn more at [NewfaneHistoricalSociety.com](http://NewfaneHistoricalSociety.com).



(continued from page 1)...toys, food, building supplies, appliances, live animals, furniture, saddles, musical instruments, weapons, books, carriages and bicycles.

Roebuck sold his part of the business in 1895 to Chicago businessmen Aaron Nusbaum and Julius Rosenwald (Sears and Rosenwald bought Nusbaum out in 1903). The company then expanded the product line to sell nearly anything a customer could desire. The business maintained great success for nearly a century,



which included popular department stores and going public on the stock market. Other business ventures included a bank, travel agency, photography studios, TV and radio stations, and Chicago's tallest building, the Sears Tower. They also created Discover credit cards, Craftsman tools, Kenmore appliances, Allstate insurance, and co-created one of the first home internet services, called Prodigy. The company officially became Sears in 2004, due to its colloquially shortened name already used by many.

Unfortunately the business could not compete with changing markets in the 21st century, due to the endangered catalog business, growing internet sales, and an inability to keep up with changing retail (which they had achieved successfully for decades prior). Sears stopped their legendary catalog sales in the 1990's and eventually declared bankruptcy. The retail empire survives in minimal form, yet its future remains uncertain.

**Bringing the store to you**

In an era when print media reigned supreme, Sears dominated the rural retail market through its huge catalog, an amazing work of product advertising, consumer education, and corporate branding. R.W. Sears was a master in sales, slogans and catchy phrases. He was also very aware of his various consumer bases, allowing him to appeal to a broad audience. For many years he wrote nearly every line of text in the catalogs, drawing upon his personal experience and using language and expressions that appealed to his target customers.

Catalog covers included titles such as "Book of Bargains: A Money Saver for Everyone," "Cheapest Supply House on Earth," and claims that "Our trade reaches around the World." It often contained testimonials from satisfied customers, and they made every effort to assure their readers that Sears had the lowest prices and best values.

By 1896 they expanded the catalog by offering unique spring and fall printings,

along with occasional special editions for holidays or new products. The books were so popular they began charging 25 cents per issue, and for a time waived the cost on any orders over \$10. Despite the new fee, the books continued to expand readership, allowing Sears and his design staff to greatly improve the publication.



They added color ink in 1897 to sections. Among the benefits of color was the specialty catalog featuring paint options in true shades. In 1905 they introduced specialty books that included full color and texture wallpaper samples, and swatches of clothing.

Both Sears and Rosenwald also felt it was important to offer strong customer service, quality products and simple ordering, no matter who the purchaser was. Their simple, warm and customer-first approach helped it stand out among their competitors.

They employed translators who could read and write in many languages to assist with the incoming orders. The mail staff were also required to accept payment and orders no matter whether they were proper forms or written on a scrap of paper (something their competitors did not allow). This was an enormous benefit for the millions of illiterate Americans who could finally make purchases, regardless of their understanding of ordering protocol. Rules such as these helped further the catalog's appeal to the masses while also bettering American lives.

The Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog was so successful because it sold an ideal of middle-class life to generations of Americans. It also featured low cost but necessary items such as underwear, towels and bedding, products that continued to sell and keep the company growing through the Depression.

**Boosting equality**

It is the Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog that, without a doubt, had altering effects the world over. They purposefully targeted rural areas in early years, seeing the large, underserved market. Living far from cities, farmers and small communities could only get supplies from nearby

general stores that often charged high prices and high-interest credit. Sears and Roebuck offered an extensive line of products at clearly stated prices, most with photos or images to show the consumer their options. The prices were more affordable, and the catalogs had far more items and options than a small store could ever hold. For the first time Americans could easily own products created all over the world, and often had far longer wish lists of items than they could afford. The catalog became known as "the consumer's bible," and every new edition became an indispensable home item.

**SEARS, ROEBUCK & CO.**

WE SELL EVERYTHING BY MAIL ORDER ONLY. YOUR MONEY WILL BE PROMPTLY RETURNED FOR ANY GOODS NOT PERFECTLY SATISFACTORY AND WE WILL PAY FREIGHT OR EXPRESS CHARGES BOTH WAYS



An undated photo from Sears shows hundreds of clerks entering orders for items to be shipped from a giant warehouse in Chicago. The Chicago Tribune reported July 4, 1906, that Sears was receiving 75,000 letters/ orders per day.

Less known but of great importance in Sears' catalog history is the life-altering benefits for minorities in America, primarily black southerners. Blatant racism and segregation highly restricted their...(continued on page 4)



(continued from page 3)...ability to purchase nearly anything needed to live. Shopping at the mainly white-owned stores was always humiliating; black families were verbally abused and suffered extreme price gouging and no credit. White communities made great efforts to ensure black families never had the opportunity to become equals, thus leaving them little chances or hope of bettering their lives.

Because the Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog allowed anyone to purchase by mail or phone, minorities could receive items without paying inflated prices. They could purchase anything they wanted while avoiding face-to-face sales in stores and communities they were not welcome. While families were limited to purchases they could pay in full up-front, it was still the first time in their lives they even had the chance to do so. Some even credit the catalog with fostering the creation of Delta blues music, as the catalog sold the guitars and strings used by the original musicians who developed the unique sounds.

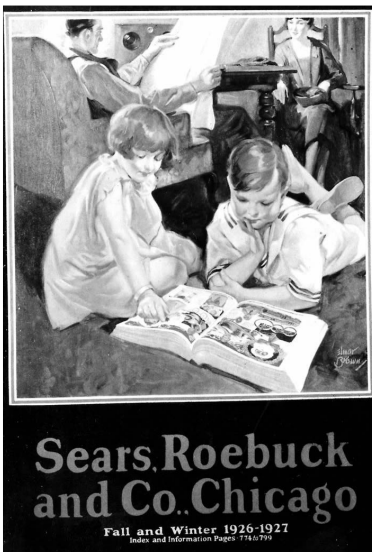
Sears' success also helped boost business in countless fields of industry located the world over. This helped 'spread the wealth' to innumerable communities that suddenly benefited (more income, more job opportunities) from selling to a worldwide audience. The catalogs represented the work and efforts of thousands of Americans.

Another benefit came in 1908, with one of the most famous and ambitious of all catalog offerings: Home kits, advertised with the promise that "We will furnish all the material to build this [house design]". Sears offered 2 dozen designs, with names such as 'Magnolia' and 'Winona', typically ranging between \$700-\$7,000. The kits could contain as many as 30,000 pieces, all ready for the buyer to construct their own home. They could be outfitted with the latest technology for additional costs, including phone lines, indoor plumbing and central heating. This new venture allowed many families to become home owners for the first time, an achievement previously not thought possible for many. Companies and communities even bought the homes in bulk to save money or grow their towns. One example is Standard Oil, who created a town for its Carlin, Illinois mineworkers. It consisted entirely of 156 Sears homes. From 1908 to 1940 Sears sold between 70,000 - 75,000 homes, and thanks to their surprisingly good workmanship, thousands of them are still standing.

**A lasting legacy**

By the early 20th century, the catalog had become so entwined with the American psyche that the government began to use it for propaganda purposes. During the World Wars, thousands of catalogs were sent to American soldiers, helping bring them a taste of home. President Franklin Roosevelt famously said that the best way to combat communism was to hand out Sears catalogs.

They had a great effect on consumerism during the holidays as well, with the 1933 launch of their Christmas catalog, known as the 'Wish Book'. At 87 pages, it exclusively featured the best or most popular options for gifts: toys, housewares, tools, clothing, jewelry, appliances and holiday decorations. The success of their Christmas catalog was in response to consumer's high interest in gift-giving,



however the book encouraged larger annual spending than before its creation. The Wish Book was over 600 pages by the 1960s.

The catalog even partnered with famous figures, further intertwining celebrity status and commercialism as an ideal culture. Among those who worked with Sears, Roebuck & Co. were Gloria Swanson, Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Susan Hayward, Lauren Bacall, Ted Williams, Susan Day and Cheryl Tiegs. During the Great Depression, artist Norman Rockwell created a series of paintings for the catalogs' covers.

Celebrity promotions, direct-mail shopping, massive distribution centers providing products from thousands of businesses, ordering from around the world without leaving your home...it all sounds familiar doesn't it? It's clear Sears helped lay the groundwork that benefitted future internet sales.

One of the greatest values the catalog has gifted the world has been its ability to preserve and showcase decades of American life. The 1943 Sears News Graphic wrote that the Sears catalog "serves as a mirror of our times, recording for future historians today's desires, habits, customs, and mode of living." This quote rings true today, as any edition of the catalog instantly transport you to the year of its printing, thanks to everything from the products for sale to the fonts and



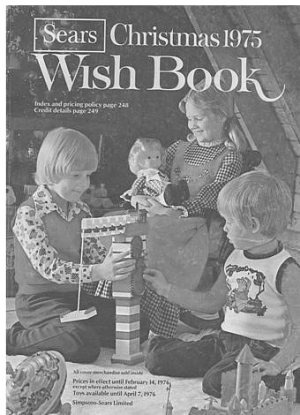
Female employees handle merchandise in a Sears back room. c. 1920s

dialect. Sears' success was in part due to its ability to mirror the ups and downs of the current economy, which is vividly clear when comparing pages during the Great Depression years to those following World War II. They are a great resource for visually understanding how economy affects everyday living.

Historians today marvel at the pages of fraternal pins for sale, whether from college fraternities to freemasons. Many products, from athletic equipment to electronics, are shown in clear chronology, helping us to better learn and understand their evolution.

Because the catalogs accurately reflect the styles and furnishings popular through the years, producers of Broadway shows and Hollywood movies have frequently referred to them. Between 1890-1950 there is perhaps no better archive of American life than what is found in the pages created by Sears, Roebuck & Co.

A review of Sears' legacy would not be accurate without a mention of the fiercer business aspects, the same for...(continued on page 5)



(continued from page 4)...any prominent business with power even today. Sears was a tightly run ship, which always sought to cut costs and tightly control distribution. Over time this led to lower quality products and supply chains unable to remain self-sustaining. Sears also battled for decades against its own workers, resisting pay increases, unions and labor equality for women and minorities. They resisted progressive social movements, undermining and resisting efforts to improve working conditions. The most well-known fight came in 1986 with a discrimination lawsuit, which Sears lost bitterly. Sears can be a great resource for studying the best and worst aspects of business all at once.

Consider visiting a public library, or finding a copy of the Sears, Roebuck & Co. catalog online or at an antique dealer. No matter the page you view first, you'll be instantly transported to an era where prices were cheaper and the products sold are no longer needed today (or have evolved). Occasionally you get a sense of how little has changed: the pages are filled the latest trends, products you simply cannot live without, and amazing new (and ultimately short-lived) inventions. The catalogs even sell using techniques and verbiage sometimes used today. You see how much has changed in a century, yet also how little has changed. These contradictory viewpoints help us better understand and relate to our ancestors; a remarkable achievement for a sales catalog. It is a wonderful legacy for a company that started with scammed inventory and ended up revolutionizing the world. ♦

**Shop the MODERN Way**



from your easy chair

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# Membership Application

*For new members and renewals. Membership includes our quarterly printed newsletters.*

Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name (Please Print) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Select One:

- Renewal     New Member

Would you be interested in learning about or becoming a volunteer?  Yes  No

*Our membership year begins on January 1st and ends on December 31st.*

Annual Membership Dues (Check one):

- Family Membership \$10.00  
 Individual Membership \$10.00  
 Life Member \$100.00 (per person)

Tear off this portion and mail with a check to: Newfane Historical Society c/o Rosemary M. Miller 3531 Ewings Rd. Lockport, NY 14094

Please make all checks payable to (or to the order of):  
 Newfane Historical Society

**Or visit our website and join online: [www.NewfaneHistoricalSociety.com](http://www.NewfaneHistoricalSociety.com)**

# Calendar

For more details, please visit our website.

- February 18th- President's Day
- February 19th- Trustees Meeting
- March 10th- Daylight Savings Begins
- March 17th- St. Patrick's Day
- March 19th- Trustees Meeting
- April 7th- Sunday Tours of the Van Horn Mansion return, 1-4pm (through November)
- April 15th- Tax Day
- April 16th- Trustees Meeting
- April 21st- Easter Sunday
- May 5th- Cinco De Mayo
- May 12th- Mother's Day
- May 19th- Apple Blossom Festival

# 2019 Officers & Trustees

- President:** Vicki Banks
- Vice President:** Melissa Schaeffer
- Recording Secretary:** Virginia Dillman
- Corresponding Secretary:** Janet Capen
- Financial Secretary:** Rosemary Miller
- Treasurer:** David Steggles

### Trustees:

Bill Clark	Kevin Luckman	Bill Ott
Keegan Connolly	Chuck Manhardt	Mindi Schaeffer
Steve Goodman	Sheila McAtee	Rose Schaeffer
Jill Heck	Bill Neidlinger	George Updegraph

# Contact Information

<b>Town of Newfane Historical Society</b> P.O. Box 115 Newfane, NY 14108	<b>Country Village</b> 2685 West Creek Rd. Newfane, NY 14108	<b>Van Horn Mansion</b> 2165 Lockport-Olcott Rd. Burt, NY 14028
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[www.NewfaneHistoricalSociety.com](http://www.NewfaneHistoricalSociety.com)

Phone: (716) 778-7197 | [info@newfanehistoricalsociety.com](mailto:info@newfanehistoricalsociety.com)

Moving? Remember to update your address with us so you keep receiving newsletters!

*Have ever snowflakes,  
it's time for raindrops!*



Address Service Requested

TOWN OF NEWFANE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
P.O. BOX 115  
NEWFANE, NY 14108



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Permit No. 49