

Newsletter

Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner

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Is Your House a “Sears House”?

by Suzanne Isaksen

Before the days of on-line ordering through websites like **Sears.com**, the Sears “Big Book” and Christmas “Wish Book” were fixtures in our homes. We could flip through the pages and order clothing, household items, and toys and eagerly await the phone call to let us know they had arrived at the “Catalog Pick-up” department of our local Sears store.

Did you ever imagine that you could order an entire house through the Sears catalog?

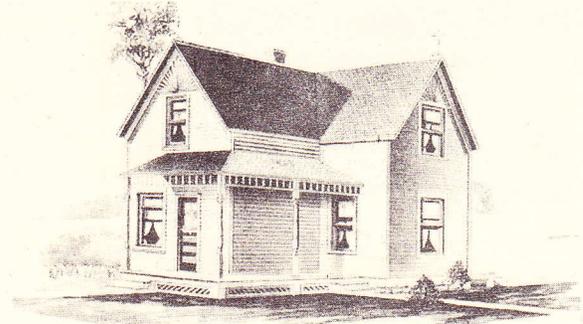
In 1906, a Sears merchandising employee named Frank W. Kushel was tasked with getting rid of the company’s building materials department, which had been losing money through low sales and expensive warehouse costs. He devised a plan to market the building materials as “packages” – that is, everything that would be needed to build a house, from nails and screws to windows and doors and even staircases and mantelpieces. In 1908, Sears, Roebuck and Company published its first “Book of Modern Homes and Building Plans” – 44 pages designed to help new owners purchase and build their dream home. That first year, 22 styles ranging in price from \$650–\$2,500 were offered. The kit houses would be shipped by rail to the customer’s nearest freight station.

At first, framing lumber was not included in kits, but in 1911 the lumber also was shipped for cutting at the building site. In 1914, the Ready-Cut House package provided not only plans, specifications, and detailed assembly instructions but also precut and factory-fitted lumber as well as all other building materials except masonry. The kits were marketed so that a man “of average abilities” could complete construction of his house in 30-90 days. The lumber was stamped with the Sears name and numbered on the ends of the boards to correspond to floor plan numbers. Some customers did endeavor to construct their own homes from the kits containing 10,000 to 30,000 pieces, but many hired local builders to put the kits together.

Sears kit houses were offered in the Modern Homes catalogs from 1908 to 1940. Early catalogs listed kits by number, such as Modern Home No. 115. Later, kit designs were given names like “The Wellington” and “The Cinderella.” Over the years, 447 different designs were made available in three categories to suit the customer’s taste and budget. The “Honor Bilt” homes were the most expensive and offered the highest-quality materials as well as heavy framing and double floors. The “Standard Built” House was a lightly framed house generally recommended for summer cottages or warmer climates. The last category was the “Simplex Sectional” line, also ideal for summer cottages because of the simple designs of fewer rooms. Of course, Sears also marketed all the items you would need to go with your new house, from bathroom fixtures to living room furniture.

\$725⁰⁰ and Our FREE BUILDING PLANS
WILL BUILD, PAINT AND COMPLETE, READY FOR OCCUPANCY,
THIS INVITING \$1,100.00 SIX-ROOM COTTAGE.

We tell you on page 2 how we furnish, free, the plans for this house, or any of the many houses shown in this book.



MODERN HOME No. 115

When Sears, Roebuck and Company discontinued the Modern Homes catalog program in 1940, it had supplied nearly 100,000 families with their dream home. Sears was not the only company to provide mail-order kit homes. Still, many who purchase these popular homes like to look for clues that their house is a “Sears House.” Rosemary Thornton, the foremost authority of Sears Roebuck Kit Homes and author of **The Houses That Sears Built**, provides the following tips (verbatim) for your “home detective work”:
(cont’d, p.2)

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Letter from the Co-Presidents

Dear Members and Friends,

We would like to thank the **Gardiner Historical Society** for hosting our last general meeting. The speakers were very informative (see article on p. 3) and the refreshments were delicious. We also look forward to our next meeting in May at the Wallkill Town Hall. **Stewart Crowell** will discuss the making of historic brick which was actually done at historic Huguenot Street in New Paltz. Also thanks are due to the many people who donated generously towards the renovation of the chimney and roof at the **Andries DuBois** house. We are presently awaiting bids and then the restoration process will continue!

Carolyn Crowell and Toni Gagan, Co-Presidents

(cont'd from p. 1)

- Look for stamped lumber on the exposed beams/joists/rafters in the basement, crawl space or attic.
- Inspect the back of millwork (moldings and trim) for shipping labels.
- Check the home's floor plan, footprint (exterior dimensions) and room size, using a field guide to Sears Homes, such as "Finding The Houses That Sears Built" (2004, Gentle Beam Publications).
- Visit the courthouse and inspect old building permits and grantor records.
- Inspect plumbing fixtures for marks, such as "R" or "SR."
- Look for markings on back of sheet rock.
- Unique column arrangement on front porch and five-piece eave brackets.
- Square block on moldings at staircase landings, where moldings meet at odd angles.
- Verify your home's construction date. If your home was not built between 1908 - 1940, it can not be a Sears Home.

If you find that you are the owner of a Sears Roebuck Kit House, you can register as a "Sears Home Enthusiast" at <http://www.searsarchives.com/homes/registry.htm>. The Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner would also like to hear from you!

HASBROUCK FAMILY HOUSES

Coincidentally this Spring the **Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner** and the **Historical Society of Gardiner** sponsored talks about the **Hasbrouck family's** ambitious construction of houses in the 18th and early 19th centuries, and, not surprisingly, their contributions to the preservation of local history.

On Wednesday March 4 at Shawangunk Town Hall, **Harold Van Aken** and **Alan White** presented "**Shawangunk: The Early Years – Land and Houses,**" a carefully researched talk with pictures. Van Aken identified lots within the 1709 Van Dam Patent (on the east side of the Wallkill River) purchased by pioneering families. Four of the earliest homesteads were built during this period by **Benjamin Hasbrouck** (1771), **Cornelius Bruyn** 1776), **Andries DuBois** (1769), and **Justus Banks** (1772).



Cornelius Bruyn (Phinney)'s house on the Wallkill River, built in 1776 (1766), now the site of the Wallkill Savings & Loan Association

Alan White continued the presentation with construction details from these houses and photo illustrations of their foundations, stone walls, floors, walls, roofs and rafters, hardware and hinges, porches, and dormers.

On Monday April 4 at the Gardiner Town Hall, the Historical Society of Gardiner met jointly with the Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner. **Carleton Mabee**, Gardiner historian, spoke about **Kenneth Edward Hasbrouck, Sr.**, based on Hasbrouck's "My Recollections," and Mabee's personal association with the Gardiner resident. Hasbrouck was born on the family farm of his great-grandfather Daniel Hasbrouck in Gardiner and devoted much of his life, apart from his teaching career, to the preservation of local history. In 1949 he held the posts of town historian of Gardiner, Shawangunk, as well as

village historian of New Paltz. Hasbrouck was the founder of the Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner and wrote a great deal, mostly pamphlets. His publications included histories of the Townships of Gardiner, Shawangunk, Modena, Leptondale, New Paltz, and the families of Hasbrouck, Bevier, and Crispell. We owe a debt to Kenneth Hasbrouck for much of what we know about the history of Shawangunk and Gardiner.

Following this presentation, **Ken Walton** spoke on **Early Historic Houses built by the Hasbrouck Family, 1721-1814**. He illustrated his talk with photos of the many Hasbrouck houses which he had personally tracked down in New Paltz (Daniel in 1721 and Jacob in 1722), E. Fishkill (Hasbrouck/Horton in the 1730s), Hopewell Junction (Benjamin in 1755), Kingston (Colonel Abraham in 1735), Gardiner (Joseph in 1706), and Newburgh (Jonathan in 1750). Other branches of the family built houses during this period in Stone Ridge, Rochester, High Falls, New Paltz, Kingston, and Clintondale. A good number of Hasbrouck houses were also constructed in Gardiner (Isaac in 1766, Joseph in 1787, Luther c. 1800, Philip (1805), Philip again in 1811 after a new marriage, and Josiah in 1814.



This Benjamin Hasbrouck 1771 house was later purchased by John G. Borden.

Some of the Hasbrouck houses have special histories. The most famous is Jonathan Hasbrouck's house in Newburgh that became General George Washington's Headquarters during the Revolutionary War (1782-83). A Hasbrouck house was burned by the British in 1777.

* * * *

**Historical Society of
Shawangunk & Gardiner
Spring 2011 Programs**

Wednesday, May 4 – 7:30 p.m.

The Making of Bricks:

**a demonstration, presented by Stewart
Crowell at the Shawangunk Town Hall**

Wednesday, June 1 – 6:00 p.m.

**Annual picnic – at the Shawangunk
Correctional Activity Center, Birch Road**



**The Andries DuBois House on River Road in
Wallkill, built in 1769, is undergoing restoration by
the Historical Society of Shawangunk & Gardiner.**

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