

## Sears, Roebuck & Company

During the late nineteenth century and early twentieth, the entire United States was experiencing a period of intense industrial growth. With the development of railroads and the increased use of the automobile, industrial and commercial interests sought to capitalize upon the efficiency of these transportation vehicles. One of the businesses that emerged and developed during this era of American history was the mail-order industry. People in the rural regions of the country had historically found themselves victims of retail middle-men who charged exorbitant prices for essential products. In addition to high prices, rural residents were further frustrated by the long distances between them and these retail merchandisers. The solution to these problems came with the birth of Sears, Roebuck & Company.

Richard Warren Sears established his multi-million dollar company from a humble beginning. As a young and industrious railroad agent, Sears began to sell watches part-time. In 1886, the young entrepreneur founded the R. W. Sears Watch Company. One year later, seeking a more central location and a position along the railway line that would allow for more efficient transportation of his goods, Sears moved his growing watch company to Chicago. Here in the rail hub of the U. S., Sears took on as his associate, Alvuh Curtis Roebuck, a talented watch repairman who also had a flair for advertising.

September 16, 1893, marked the birth of Sears, Roebuck & Company. Initially only carrying watches and jewelry, in just two years, the Sears catalog carried a wide variety of merchandise including watches, jewelry, clothing, housewares, and more. The company dedicated itself to servicing the needs of the often neglected or exploited rural community. In fact, at one point, Sears would not even fill the mail orders of Chicago residents.

By 1904, the growing Sears & Roebuck could no longer remain confined to the rented spaces it had been using for its headquarters since its establishment. In 1904, the first official Sears, Roebuck & Company plant was erected in Chicago. Contemporary architectural periodicals heralded the Chicago plant, designed by Nimmons & Fellows of Chicago, as the largest mercantile plant in the world.

### Sears, Roebuck & Company in Atlanta

Sears, Roebuck & Company came to Atlanta in 1926. Atlanta was selected to house the distribution headquarters for the southeast because of its position as a junction point for the railways servicing the southeast and because of the phenomenal growth that it had experienced over the previous five years.

In Georgia, Sears went beyond its duty as a mail-order and retail business, by initiating and institutionalizing programs designed to educate farmers about market trends. Through farmers' markets, broadcasting programs, and other educational efforts, the Agricultural Foundation of the company intended to aid southeastern farmers in acquiring the highest possible dollar for their products. In addition to improving the farmers' financial positions, such programs also stimulated the overall economy of the region which would ultimately mean more customers for Sears & Roebuck.

The Sears, Roebuck & Company plant is located at 677 Ponce de Leon Avenue, N. E. The Ponce de Leon area has historically been serviced by transportation facilities from the street cars of the Georgia Railway and Electric Company to the Southern Railway Belt Line, making the avenue a choice location for a major distribution center.

Ponce de Leon was named by Dr. Henry Wilson in 1870, for two legendary springs which were reputed to have curative qualities. Throughout its history, the area has displayed the vitality that the springs were rumored to provide. The springs were only one of the many attractions that brought large numbers of Atlantans to the area. Located just to the west of Ponce de Leon Springs was a recreation park which entertained guests with rides, theater productions, a skating rink, and games. Ponce de Leon Ball Park housed Atlanta's baseball team, the Crackers. The luxurious Georgian Terrace Hotel was situated at the corner of Peachtree and Ponce de Leon, and in 1914, the Ford Motor Company Atlanta plant was built.

The Sears & Roebuck building sits atop the famous, revitalizing springs of Ponce de Leon Avenue. The architectural style of the Atlanta plant is characteristic of the design of the other Sears & Roebuck buildings erected before 1932. The Atlanta structure features the prominent tower rising over a rather severe block which became the outstanding feature in the general design of all Sears buildings. While the tower proved an impressive and attractive feature looming above the main entrance, its actual function was that of a water-tank inclosure. The tower also housed the administrative offices of the company.

In the designing of the buildings, the architects, George C. Nimmons & Company, carefully arranged the buildings and components of the buildings in a way that would secure the "most economical handling of goods over large areas; provide for the best and most rapid shipping facilities; insure the care of employees; and provide security from fire and injury in panics..." according to the Architectural Record of June, 1906.

In the year following completion of the Atlanta plant, 1927, Sears' first Atlanta retail store opened in the building. The building served local customers, as well as, those mail-order customers in eleven southeastern states. In 1979,

Seab BUILDING DATA

SECTION	YEAR BUILT
1	1926
2 Part 1 Lower	1966
Part 2 Upper	1971
3	1926
4	1926
5	1929
6	1946
7 Part 1	1960
Part 2	1967
Power House	1966
Parking Deck	1967

