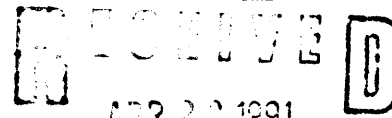


United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



NATIONAL REGISTER

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See Instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the Instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900-a). Type all entries.

1. Name of Property

historic name Sears, Roebuck Department Store
other names/site number Comstock Library

2. Location

street & number W. 902 Main Ave. not for publication
city, town Spokane vicinity
state Washington code WA county Spokane code 063 zip code 99201

3. Classification

Ownership of Property	Category of Property	Number of Resources within Property	
<input type="checkbox"/> private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	Contributing	Noncontributing
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> public-local	<input type="checkbox"/> district	<u>1</u>	<u>—</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-State	<input type="checkbox"/> site	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> public-Federal	<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<u>—</u>	<u>—</u>
	<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>
			Total

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of certifying official *[Signature]* Date 3/28/91
Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official _____ Date _____
State or Federal agency and bureau

5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this property is:
 entered in the National Register. *[Signature]* June 4, 1991
 See continuation sheet.
 determined eligible for the National Register. See continuation sheet.
 determined not eligible for the National Register.
 removed from the National Register.
 other, (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Commerce: department store

Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Education: library

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco

Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation concrete

walls brick

roof built-up tar

other

Describe present and historic physical appearance.

The Sears, Roebuck Department Store is a square three-story Art Deco style building with a five-story tower projecting from the main facade. The building, completed in 1930, boasts a structural system of reinforced concrete. The foundation is supported by 940 cedar pilings driven to depths of 15 to 30 feet.

The exterior of the building is clad with blonde brick, while pre-cast Art Deco detailing embellishes the facade, including the roof line, window and door surrounds, and other accent points. A multiple Deco stringcourse enhances the roof line; pilasters embellish the door and display window openings. The east side street-level is the most altered facade on the building. Although the south side entrance has been altered by the inclusion of automatic doors, the north side entrance retains its original wooden doors. Light panels in and above these entry doors are also still intact. Pre-cast diamonds in relief are spaced just above and outside the corners of the display windows. Due to interior alterations, the transom panels above the display windows have been painted over; however, the original window configuration is intact.

The windows on the second and third floors are the original, metal sash, one-over-one double-hung units. The east and west side windows are in rows of 16 across, while the windows on each floor are set within vertical recessed panels. Window surrounds are pre-cast concrete, the slip sills are brick, and the third floor window header is a pre-cast Deco stringcourse which wraps around the entire building and extends to the roof line. Windows on the front (south) facade share the same treatment, except there are 12 pairs--six on each side of the tower.

The central tower which dominates the south side is the most striking feature of the building. Its vertical lines are accentuated by pre-cast pilasters which border both the main doors and display windows. Four double-hung windows run, in a recessed vertical strip, up the center of the tower and are bordered with decorative brickwork. Pre-cast diamond patterns embellish the panels of the vertical strip of windows. The tower is capped with geometric Art Deco detailing, which is even more elaborate than the details found on the rest of the building.

Like other "A" stores across the country, when this Sears "A" store was first constructed in Spokane under the supervision of the architectural firm of Nimmons, Carr and Wright, its primary function was to display merchandise. To accomplish this goal, the building's interior floor plan consisted primarily of open retail space, with limited interruption to the eye. Massive round pillars supported ceilings and floors to eliminate the need for load-bearing walls. Even the basement was used for retail space and shared the same floor plan. Offices were confined to the northwest corner of the building on the third floor.

8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally statewide locally

Applicable National Register Criteria A B C D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions) A B C D E F G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1930

Significant Dates

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Nimmons, Carr & Wright

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

Although Spokane has retained an impressive array of Art Deco buildings within its city center, the original Sears building retains a higher degree of architectural integrity than comparable retail buildings from the period. A prime example of Sears' top-of-the-line retail chain stores, this facility offered affordable merchandise to a diverse clientele for over 30 years. As one of the world's largest retail and catalog store chains, the merchandising efforts of Sears, Roebuck and Company have ranged from selling discount watches at the turn of the century to selling pre-fabricated homes by catalog. The Spokane store retains sufficient integrity to convey its significant character as an example of a large-scale department store from the period, and an impressive example of the Art Deco style in Spokane. It is the best preserved example of an Art Deco Sears store in Washington State and, as such, is an important example of a nationally promulgated design.

Historical Background: Richard W. Sears began the company which bears his name in 1886. As a young railroad agent in Redwood, Minnesota, Sears came across a shipment of watches a jeweler refused to accept. Knowing the demand for watches among railroad workers, Sears contacted the watch company and obtained the watches at a considerable discount. He then proceeded to write his fellow workers describing the watches and offering them at an exceptional price. Sears soon sold out of his stock, realizing a good profit. In hopes of continued success, Sears quit his job as a railroad agent and started selling watches by catalog.

By 1887 Sears' growing business required that he hire a watch repairman. He placed an ad in a local Minnesota newspaper and eventually hired Alvah Curtis Roebuck. Roebuck later became a partner in the firm, and by the turn of the century, Sears, Roebuck and Company had expanded its catalog selection to include everything from watches and clothing, to furniture and farm equipment. Sears catered in particular to the needs of rural populations.

In 1924 Robert Wood, an ex-army general, was hired by Sears to develop the company's retail chain stores. These were classified into three types of stores. The "A" Store, the grandest of all the Sears buildings, contained almost all of the items featured in the catalog.

The next class was the "B" Store. During the late 1920s and early 30s, Sears was in fierce competition with Montgomery Ward and J. C. Penney's for strategic locations for their stores. Sears would often rent a building for a "B" store and later construct a larger building. Although the "B" store offered a large selection of catalog items, the reduced store size somewhat limited the amount of merchandise in stock.

See continuation sheet

9. Major Bibliographical References

The *Spokesman-Review*, February 27, 1930
Hyslop, Robert. *Spokane's Building Blocks*. Standard Blueprint Co., August 1983.
Polk's Spokane City Directories--1929, 1930.
Department of Public Works, City of Spokane.
Telephone interview with Ron Smith, Brand master, Sears, Roebuck & Co.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Specify repository: _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property less than one

UTM References

A	<u>11</u>	<u>468140</u>	<u>5278330</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing
C			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

B			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
D			
	Zone	Easting	Northing

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

Beginning at the intersection of the North line of Main Avenue with the West line of Lincoln Street; thence northerly along the West line of Lincoln Street a distance of 300 feet; thence due west along the extended southerly line of Trent Avenue a distance of 81 feet; thence south 66° 23' west a distance of 26 feet; thence south 43° 37' west a distance of 115 feet; thence south 73° 23½' west a distance of 68.64 feet; thence south 86° 36' west a distance of 76.25 feet, more or less, to a point on the East line of Monroe

See continuation sheet

Boundary Justification

The nominated property includes the entire parcel historically associated with the Sears building.

See continuation sheet

11. Form Prepared By

Name/title		date	<u>February 1991</u>
organization	<u>Spokane City/County Hist. Pres. Office</u>	telephone	<u>(509) 456-4340</u>
street & number	<u>W. 808 Spokane Falls Blvd.</u>	state	<u>Washington</u> zip code <u>99201</u>
city or town	<u>Spokane</u>		

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The interior of the building has since been altered to some degree in order to accommodate the library. Storage and archives rooms have been incorporated into the floor plan through the use of partition walls on all floors. Additional interior alterations include dropped ceilings on all levels, which have reduced the original window height. The transom panels on the first floor south wall are also hidden. Although the library conveys an open feeling, the existing open space represents a slight reduction in comparison to the original Sears floor plan.

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The “C” store, in turn, featured only hardware and household items, neglecting clothes and furniture. The “C” stores were usually located out in the suburbs or in small towns.

Situated in the midst of a vast rural/agricultural area, Spokane proved an ideal location for a Sears venture of some magnitude. The Sears store erected on February 27, 1930 in Spokane was a class “A” store. The cost of construction was \$500,000; an additional \$250,000 was invested in merchandise for the facility. The Spokane Sears store was the 72nd class “A” store constructed in the United States. Located on the corner of Main and Lincoln, it stood only a block away from Montgomery Ward’s new building, completed in 1929.

This was, in fact, a period of fierce competition among department stores, shop owners and other merchants for retail dollars in Spokane. From the 1900s to the 1950s, most Spokane merchants located their businesses downtown, and shoppers fulfilled their needs within the confines of the city center.

Local businesses like Davenport’s and Haddad’s specialized in merchandise and apparel aimed at an upper-end market. The locally owned Crescent and Palace department stores concentrated on upscale clothing and home furnishings. In contrast, the Sears and Montgomery Ward chain stores offered a wide range of affordable merchandise which appealed to a broad clientele and satisfied many needs.

Of the locally-owned department store type operations, the original site of the Crescent has been demolished, and the Palace now houses Nordstrom. The latter building was constructed in 1909 and does not retain the same degree of integrity as the Sears Building, having been substantially updated by Nordstrom. The second Crescent store, located at Wall and Riverside, was erected in 1919. The architect was L. L. Rand, who designed an impressive Neoclassical building elegantly clad with terra cotta detail. Now the site of Frederick and Nelson’s, the 1919 Crescent store retains much of its original integrity of design. When compared to the Sears facility, the decade which separates these two buildings in time--and the differences in their audiences--becomes immediately apparent. Again, it is Montgomery Ward which most closely approximates Sears in design and intent.

Nevertheless, despite the obvious similarities between the Sears Building and that of its chief competitor, the facility at Main and Lincoln has maintained the greater degree of architectural integrity. While the Montgomery Ward Building has been marred by the addition of a third floor skywalk into the primary facade and the replacement of its original windows, the Sears building has experienced a fairly smooth transition to a new use.

Despite minor alterations the Sears building remains today a fine example of the Art Deco style, and an integral part of Spokane’s impressive collection of Art Deco buildings. Other Art Deco contemporaries

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in Spokane include the City Ramp, the Rookery Building and the Fox Theater, as well as the Montgomery Ward Building, "home" of Sears' major competitor.

The City Ramp, completed in 1927, was the City's first parking garage. The reinforced concrete structure has an ornate exterior, embellished with stucco piers extending to the roof line and culminating in decorated finials. The spandrels are clad with textured brick, accented with polychrome tile and terra cotta.

The Montgomery Ward Building, now City Hall, was completed in 1929. Rising seven stories in height and constructed of reinforced concrete, this building is greatly enhanced by Art Deco designs in a stylized floral motif. Like the Sears Building, Montgomery Ward's cannot rival the elegance of design and styling evident in the City Ramp garage. Nevertheless, both these buildings have utilized modest versions of a fashionable style of the 1920s and 1930s to attract a specific element of the Spokane market. The Montgomery Ward Building was listed in the State Register of Historic Places in 1980. Despite a monochromatic color scheme which fails to enhance its Deco details, the Sears Building certainly rivals the Montgomery Ward Building in integrity of design, and architectural quality. Indeed, the Sears chain helped popularize the Art Deco style nationally; the Spokane store is the finest extant example of the company's designs in the state of Washington.

In 1961, Sears decided to relocate to the Northtown Shopping Mall. Sears sold the downtown building to the Comstock Foundation to be used as Spokane's new library. A \$300,000 bond issue was approved for refurbishing the Sears store, and converting it into the new library.

By July of 1962, architect Carl W. Vantyne had been commissioned to oversee the remodeling of the library. As many as fifteen bids were submitted for the project, and on October 4, 1962, the Gus J. Burton Construction Company was selected to undertake the job. On Saturday, April 21, 1963, the new library opened its doors.

Since 1963, the Comstock Library has operated in this location, expanding its collection of books and research materials, but never expanding the floor plan. Deemed inadequate to serve present needs, the original Sears Building is currently scheduled for replacement with a new library facility on the same site. A local bond issue approved by Spokane voters in 1990 will finance the construction project.

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Street which is 182 feet north of the North line of Main Avenue; thence southerly along the East line of Monroe Street a distance of 67.15 feet; thence easterly at right angles to the East line of Monroe Street a distance of 141.75 feet; thence southerly parallel with the East line of Monroe Street a distance of 114.85 feet to the North line of Main Avenue; thence easterly along the North line of Main Avenue a distance of 183.48 feet, more or less, to the point of beginning.