

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Montgomery Ward and Company Complex

AND/OR COMMON

Montgomery Ward and Company Administration Building and Mail Order House

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

617-618 West Chicago Avenue

NOT FOR PUBLICATION 7

CITY, TOWN

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Chicago

VICINITY OF

STATE

CODE

COUNTY

CODE

Illinois

17

Cook

031

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Montgomery Ward and Company

STREET & NUMBER

619 West Chicago Avenue

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Chicago

VICINITY OF

Illinois

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Recorder of Deeds Office, City Hall and County Building

STREET & NUMBER

118 North Clark Street

CITY, TOWN

STATE

Chicago

Illinois

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Illinois Historic Structures Survey

DATE

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

Places 319

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Illinois Land & Historic Site Survey; National Register of

CITY, TOWN

STATE Historic Places

Springfield, Washington

Ill., D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Since 1909 the Montgomery Ward and Company Complex, located on Chicago's near north side and situated along the east bank of the North Branch of the Chicago River, has served as National headquarters for the country's oldest mail order firm. The two earliest structures, the old Administration Building and the Mail Order House, remain and still exhibit much of their original architectural vitality. Both are constructed of reinforced concrete and were designed by Hugh Garden, a second generation Chicago School architect and member of the distinguished firm of Schmidt, Garden and Martin. The Mail Order House, renowned for its use of the wide horizontal or "Chicago" window, has been described by noted architectural historian Carl Condit as "one of the most powerful works of utilitarian architecture that our building art has produced."¹⁰ Although an earlier Ward headquarters and catalog house, located at the corner of Michigan and Madison Avenues and in use from 1888 to 1909, is extant, it has been so extensively altered, particularly on the upper and lower levels of its exterior facade, that it shows little resemblance to its original purpose.

When Montgomery Ward founded the firm in 1872, he rented a single 12-~~by~~ 14-foot room in a building at 825 Clark Street. One year later this space was too small, and the company moved to 159 West Hubbard Street. By 1874 business was booming to such an extent that another move was warranted, this time to much larger quarters at 246-254 Kenzie Street. Two years later, Ward moved his operations to 228-230 South Wabash, where they remained for the next 12 years. In 1888 Montgomery Ward and Company purchased a building on the northwest corner of Michigan and Madison Avenues and over the years increased its size to meet the expanding company's needs. By 1906, however, the Michigan Avenue facility was too small, and high real estate costs precluded further expansion in that area. The company purchased tracts of land north and south of the Chicago Avenue bridge along the east bank of the North Branch of the Chicago River and hired the distinguished architectural firm of Schmidt, Garden, and Martin to design a new facility. Under Hugh Garden's direction construction was started on the Administration Building and Mail Order House that same year. Although the Administration Building was completed in 1907, the gigantic Mail Order House was not finished until late in 1908, and Montgomery Ward and Company did not transfer its entire operation to the new complex until early in 1909.

(continued)

¹⁰Quoted in Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, Montgomery Ward Complex, 3.

404

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1907-present

BUILDER/ARCHITECT Hugh Garden (Schmidt, Garden & Martin)

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

According to distinguished historian Daniel J. Boorstin, Montgomery Ward "proved the success of the mail order idea."¹ In addition to demonstrating the feasibility of a new method of retailing, says company historian Frank B. Latham, Ward also "profoundly influenced . . . living conditions."² For the first time, many rural Americans had access to a greater variety of material goods and at lower prices to boot. In fact, according to eminent historian Allan Nevins, within a few years after Montgomery Ward and Company was established in 1872, it "was boasting--and justly--that it had saved the consumer millions merely by forcing local dealers to sell their wares at fair prices."³

The secret of Ward's success, says Boorstin, "was not a secret at all, but simply to be honest, give good value and always let the customer be the judge."⁴ This formula not only made Ward a wealthy man, but it set a standard for the mail order industry which other firms like Sears, Roebuck and Company found it necessary to emulate in order to compete, and in the final analysis, it established the consumer trust which made a large scale mail order industry possible.

After 1900 Montgomery Ward and Company was surpassed by Sears, Roebuck and Company as the Nation's largest mail order firm largely due to the great promotional and advertising ability of its principal founder Richard Warren Sears. In the years

(continued)

¹Daniel J. Boorstin, The Americans: The Democratic Experience (New York, 1973), 124.

²Frank B. Latham, 1872-1972 A Century of Serving Consumers: The Story of Montgomery Ward (Chicago, 1972), 51.

³Allan Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America, 1865-1878 (Chicago, 1971), 172.

⁴Daniel J. Boorstin, "A. Montgomery Ward's Mail-Order Business," Chicago History, II (Spring-Summer, 1973), 148.

311

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

(See continuation sheet.)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY circa 7 acres

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,6	44,6	5,0,0	4,6	3,8	4,9,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING			
C	1,6	44,6	6,9,0	4,6	3,8	4,0,0

E	1,6	44,6	6,0,0	4,6	3,8	2,6,0
F	1,6	44,6	6,1,0	4,6	3,8	3,5,0
B	1,6	44,6	5,8,0	4,6	3,8	5,2,0
	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING			
D	1,6	44,6	7,0,0	4,6	3,8	1,5,0

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

(See last page of description.)

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Ralph J. Christian, Historian, Historic Landmarks Project

ORGANIZATION

DATE

American Association for State and Local History March 1977

STREET & NUMBER

TELEPHONE

1400 Eighth Avenue South

615-242-5583

CITY OR TOWN

STATE

Nashville,

Tennessee 37203

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

4/3

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Montgomery Ward ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE one

In later years, Montgomery Ward and Company added to the complex several warehouses, a Merchandise Research and Development Center, parking ramps, and in 1974 a 26-story office building. Since the 1960's the company has spent \$50 million in expanding and remodeling the complex both to serve their own expanding needs and as part of a conscious effort to revitalize the declining near north side.

Administration Building. Until 1974 this eight-story, rectangular shaped structure of white-painted reinforced concrete served as Montgomery Ward and Company's national headquarters. The eastward-facing building measures 14 bays wide and has a reinforced concrete frame which rests on 40-to-50-foot wooden pilings. From the one-story base, adorned with sword and torch-like motifs, vertical piers rise uninterrupted until they culminate in a parapet decorated like the base. Each bay contains three double-hung windows which are divided by continuous narrow mullions. The spandrels appear recessed, but individual window sills are distinct, creating a crisp contrast to the dominant verticality. The piers situated near the center and corners of the structure are wider, have individual double windows, and culminate in arch-like forms above the eighth floor windows. The tower, which rises four stories above the edifice at its northeast corner, was added apparently in 1929-30. Its pyramidal roof is crowned with a 22-1/2-foot bronze statue designed by J. Massey Rhine and entitled "Progress Lighting the World." Originally this figure topped the old Montgomery Ward Building located on Michigan Avenue, and its placement on the new tower was obviously an effort to link the old and new. The tower has no windows except near the top, where small windows pierce its face, and its only adornment consists of motifs like those on the base and parapet.

In 1974 the headquarters operation was shifted to a new 26-story skyscraper located approximately 60 feet east of the old building. Presently, the old headquarters, well-maintained and freshly painted, serves as a center for Montgomery Ward and Company's Buying Operations. The only major exterior change has been the sheathing of portions of the base on the north end and east side with red marble.

Mail Order House. Located approximately 40 feet north of the north end of the Administration Building, this eight-story structure of white-painted reinforced concrete measures 270 by 800 feet and is capped with a flat roof. Roughly trapezoidal in shape, the

(continued)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Montgomery Ward ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE two

building bends to conform to the shoreline of the North Branch of the Chicago River and covers several acres. When opened in 1908, the Catalog House consisted only of the three southernmost sections and measured 270 by 500 feet. Nearly 19 million cubic feet of concrete was used in its construction, and to distribute this material properly, it was necessary to use 4 huge steel derricks. The reinforced concrete frame rests on wooden piles with concrete caps. The piers are constructed of spiral hooping set within the concrete, and all columns, floors, and walls are constructed of reinforced concrete.

The treatment of the facade is characteristic of the Chicago School. Garden, says the Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, "as a second generation follower of the school, employed ornament which is subordinated to and dictated by the structural and functional nature of the building."¹¹ Simple carved bands cap the piers between the windows at each level, and the projecting courses are omitted only between the second and third floors. Here rosettes replace the brick on the spandrels, and the vertical piers become dominant. At the third level, sword-like motifs, similar to those on the Administration Building, adorn the piers between the windows.

The most noticeable exterior aspect of the structure is its rows of wide horizontal or "Chicago" windows. These were necessitated because the building had long work benches and conveyor belts which required much light. Between the rows of windows are continuous spandrels with narrow projecting bands at their tops and bottoms. Faced with red brick, the spandrels were designed to create a contrasting band with the concrete and reinforce the feeling of length, but this effect has been partially lost because the entire building has been painted white.

Inside, the structure contains miles of chutes and conveyors, storage lofts, and all the facilities necessary to fill the thousands of orders received daily. The first floor contains a railroad shed which can accommodate 24 freight cars. The most noticeable physical feature of the interior are the huge octagonal-shaped concrete pillars and supports which run the entire length of the building.

(continued)

¹¹Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, Montgomery Ward Complex, 5.

406

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Montgomery Ward ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE three

Since opening the Mail Order House in 1908, Montgomery Ward and Company has increased its size on at least three occasions between 1909 and 1960 to give the structure its present dimensions. These additions, all on the north end of the original building, follow Garden's general design and do not detract from the beauty of the original structure. Except for the covering of white paint, exterior alterations appear minimal. A portion of the south end has been converted into a retail store but interior change has been confined primarily to painting the concrete columns, ceilings, and walls and covering the floors with linoleum.

Although Montgomery Ward and Company furnished some printed material relating to the Administration Building and Mail Order House, it did not allow the AASLH representative access to the nonpublic interior areas of these buildings.

Boundary Justification. The boundary of the designated area includes the old Administration Building and the Mail Order House, a total of about 7 acres. Not included are several other company structures that are of more recent origin and consequently do not contribute to the national significance of the complex.

Boundary Description. As indicated in red on the accompanying maps [(1) U.S.G.S. 7.5' Series, Ill., Chicago Loop Quad., 1963, photorevised 1972; and (2) AASLH Sketch Map, 1977], a line beginning at the western edge of the right-of-way of Kingsbury Street and extending southwestward approximately 300 feet along the exterior plane of the north end of the Catalog House to an unmarked point on the east bank of the North Branch Canal near its junction with the North Branch of the Chicago River; thence, southward approximately 1,100 feet along the east bank of the North Branch Canal and then along the east bank of the North Branch of the Chicago River across West Chicago Avenue to the southwest corner of the Administration Building; thence, eastward approximately 250 feet along the exterior plane of the south facade of said building to the western edge of the right-of-way of Larrabee Street; thence, northward approximately 825 feet along the western edge of the right-of-way of Larrabee Street, across West Chicago Avenue, to the western edge of the right-of-way of Kingsbury Street at its intersection with Larrabee Street; thence, northwestward approximately 575 feet along the western edge of the right-of-way of Kingsbury Street to the point of beginning. (107)

✓ Technical corrected by letter to SERS August 19, 1980

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
HERITAGE CONSERVATION AND RECREATION SERVICE**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY-NOMINATION FORM**

FOR HCRS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE

Montgomery Ward Company Complex

Correction for NHL nomination form, February 26, 1980

Re: Administration Building, south side of Chicago Avenue
Correspondence from SHPO, dated January 24, 1980, indicates
that the attribution to Hugh Garden and completion date of
1907, as given in the original NHL form, are both incorrect.
Recent research shows that the Administration Building was
designed by the Montgomery Ward Company architectural staff
and constructed in 1928-29.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Montgomery Ward ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE one

since, Wards has remained second to Sears in catalogue sales and has generally followed that company's lead in adopting new selling techniques and in branching out into the retail store field. Today Montgomery Ward serves over 30 million customers in its 2,100 outlets and sells almost \$5 billion in merchandise yearly.

Since 1909 the Montgomery Ward and Company Complex, located on Chicago's near north side and situated along the east bank of the North Branch of the Chicago River, has served as National headquarters for the country's oldest mail order firm. The two earliest structures, the old Administration Building and the Mail Order House, remain and still exhibit much of their original architectural vitality. Both are constructed of reinforced concrete and were designed by Hugh Garden, a second generation Chicago School architect and member of the distinguished firm of Schmidt, Garden and Martin. The Mail Order House, renowned for its use of the wide horizontal or "Chicago" window, has been described by noted architectural historian Carl Condit as "one of the most powerful works of utilitarian architecture that our building art has produced."⁵ Although an earlier Ward headquarters and catalog house, located at the corner of Michigan and Madison Avenues and in use from 1888 to 1909, is extant, it has been so extensively altered, particularly on the upper and lower levels of its exterior facade, that it shows little resemblance to its original purpose.

History

Aaron Montgomery Ward was born February 17, 1843, in Chatham, N.J., to Sylvester A. and Julia G. Ward. A few years later, the Wards moved to Niles, Mich., where Sylvester set up a cobbler shop. Despite his family's modest circumstances, young Ward attended public school long enough to obtain a fairly good basic education. In 1857 he went to work as a cobbler's apprentice but disliked this trade and soon began to seek opportunities in other fields. After brief stints as a laborer in a barrel factory and a brick yard, Ward obtained employment in a shoe store and soon decided he wanted a career in retailing.

(continued)

⁵Quoted in Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks, Montgomery Ward Complex: Summary of Information on the Warehouse and Office Building, September 8, 1975 (Chicago, 1975), 3.

400

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Montgomery Ward ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE two

In 1862 Ward moved to St. Joseph, Mich., where he worked as a clerk in a general store. Within 3 years he was store manager, and his salary had risen from \$5 to \$100 per month. Extremely ambitious, Ward gave up this position in 1866 and went to Chicago to seek his fortune. For 2 years, he was a \$12 a week clerk for the wholesale dry goods firm headed by Marshall Field before obtaining a position as traveling salesman for Walter M. Smith and Company, a St. Louis dry goods wholesaler.

During his travels in the Nation's hinterlands, Ward, according to biographer Edward A. Duddy, "obtained an intimate knowledge of rural conditions which enabled him to make a distinctive contribution to American life."⁶ In visiting general stores he noticed the high markup on many items, the poor condition of much of the merchandise, the limited selection of goods, and the sullen discontent of many of the customers. Blaming this situation on what he considered an antiquated distribution system, Ward conceived the idea of a large store in a central location which would buy goods in large quantities direct from manufacturers for cash and then sell them by mail to consumers for cash. Most of Ward's friends ridiculed the idea of a mail order store, arguing that people would not purchase merchandise sight unseen, but he refused to abandon his idea.

In order to put his theory into practice, Ward returned to Chicago, went to work for S. W. Partridge Company, a State Street dry goods firm, and gradually accumulated a variety of merchandise. By 1871, he felt ready to launch his venture, but the Chicago Fire of that year completely destroyed his small stock of goods. Undaunted by this setback, Ward again began to accumulate merchandise.

Finally, in August, 1872 Ward, with \$1,600 in capital and two fellow employees from the Partridge Company as partners, launched Montgomery Ward and Company from a small rented room on North Clark Street. His first catalogue consisted of one page and listed 163 items ranging from cotton cloth to ostrich plumes. To obtain orders, he advertised chiefly in farm periodicals, and in the firm's early months of operation, public response was far from overwhelming. His two partners soon abandoned the venture, and Ward managed to keep it afloat only because he had kept his old job with the Partridge Company. In 1873 the Company received

(continued)

⁶Edward A. Duddy, "Aaron Montgomery Ward," Dictionary of American Biography, Vol. X, Part 1 (New York, 1936), 414.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Montgomery Ward ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE three

a needed infusion of capital when George R. Thorne, Ward's brother-in-law, became a partner.

In 1874 Montgomery Ward and Company established itself. Sales that year reached \$100,000, the first bound catalogue--a 24-page tome--appeared, and Ward felt confident enough to leave Partridge to devote full time to his own company's affairs. Two years later, sales passed the \$300,000 mark and by 1887 reached \$1 million. This "expansion was due," says Latham," to a large trade built up through orders from Granges and farmer's clubs."⁷ For many years, the firm identified itself as "the Original Grange Supply House," something of a misnomer since it was only one of several firms with which that organization dealt. Ward, however, won praise for his firm in Grange publications by agreeing to act as a purchasing agent for the organization's co-op stores and for attempting to market farmer's grain for a 1¢ a bushel commission, all of which contributed to increased catalogue sales. Ward was also responsible for a drop in local retail prices. In fact, shortly after the company was founded, says Nevins, it "was boasting--and justly--that it had saved the consumer millions merely by forcing local dealers to sell their wares at fair prices."⁸

Montgomery Ward and Company continued to grow even after the Granger movement began to decline, and was by far the largest mail order firm in the country. The secret of Ward's success, says Boorstin, "was not a secret at all, but simply to be honest, give good value and always let the customer be the judge."⁹ This formula not only made Ward a wealthy man, but it set a standard for the mail order industry which other companies found it necessary to emulate in order to compete and, in the final analysis, established the consumer trust which made a large scale mail order industry possible.

After 1900 Montgomery Ward and Company was surpassed by Sears, Roebuck and Company as the Nation's largest mail order firm largely due to the great promotional and advertising ability of its principal founder Richard Warren Sears. By this time, however,

(continued)

⁷Latham, A Century of Serving Consumers, 12.

⁸Nevins, The Emergence of Modern America, 172.

⁹Boorstin, "A. Montgomery Ward's Mail-Order Business," Chicago History, II, 148.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Montgomery Ward ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE four

Ward had almost completely withdrawn from active management. In 1893 he sold a controlling interest to his partner George R. Thorne, whose five sons were actually running the company by the turn of the century. After 1903, Ward stopped attending board meetings but retained the title of president until his death in 1913. His consuming passion in his final years was a crusade to save Chicago's lake front from commercial encroachment. As a result of his lengthy legal battles, development was stymied, and what is now Grant Park was preserved for future generations.

In the years following Ward's death, the company he founded has remained second to Sears in catalogue sales and has generally followed that company in adopting new selling techniques and in branching out into the retail store field. In 1920 Ward's nephews, the five Thorne brothers, lost control of the company, thus severing the company's last link to its founder. Today, a subsidiary of the Mobil Oil Corporation, Montgomery Ward and Company serves over 30 million customers in its 2,100 outlets and sells almost \$5 billion in merchandise yearly. Despite the changes that the firm has undergone, however, its impact on the mail-order business remains a major chapter in the history of retailing in America.

403

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET Montgomery Ward ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE one

Boorstin, Daniel J., "A. Montgomery Ward's Mail-Order Business,"
Chicago History, II (Spring-Summer, 1973), 142-52.

_____, The Americans: The Democratic Experience
(New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973).

Brooks, H. Allen, The Prairie School: Frank Lloyd Wright and
His Midwest Contemporaries (Toronto: University of Toronto
Press, 1972).

Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks,
Montgomery Ward Complex: Summary of Information on the
Warehouse and Office Building, September 8, 1975 (Chicago:
Commission on Chicago Historical and Architectural Landmarks,
1975).

Condit, Carl W., Chicago, 1910-29: Building, Planning, and
Urban Technology (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1973).

Duddy, Edward A., "Aaron Montgomery Ward," Dictionary of
American Biography, Vol. X, Part 1 (New York: Charles
Scribner's Sons, 1936).

Latham, Frank B., 1872-1972 A Century of Serving Consumers:
The Story of Montgomery Ward (Chicago: Montgomery Ward
and Company, 1972).

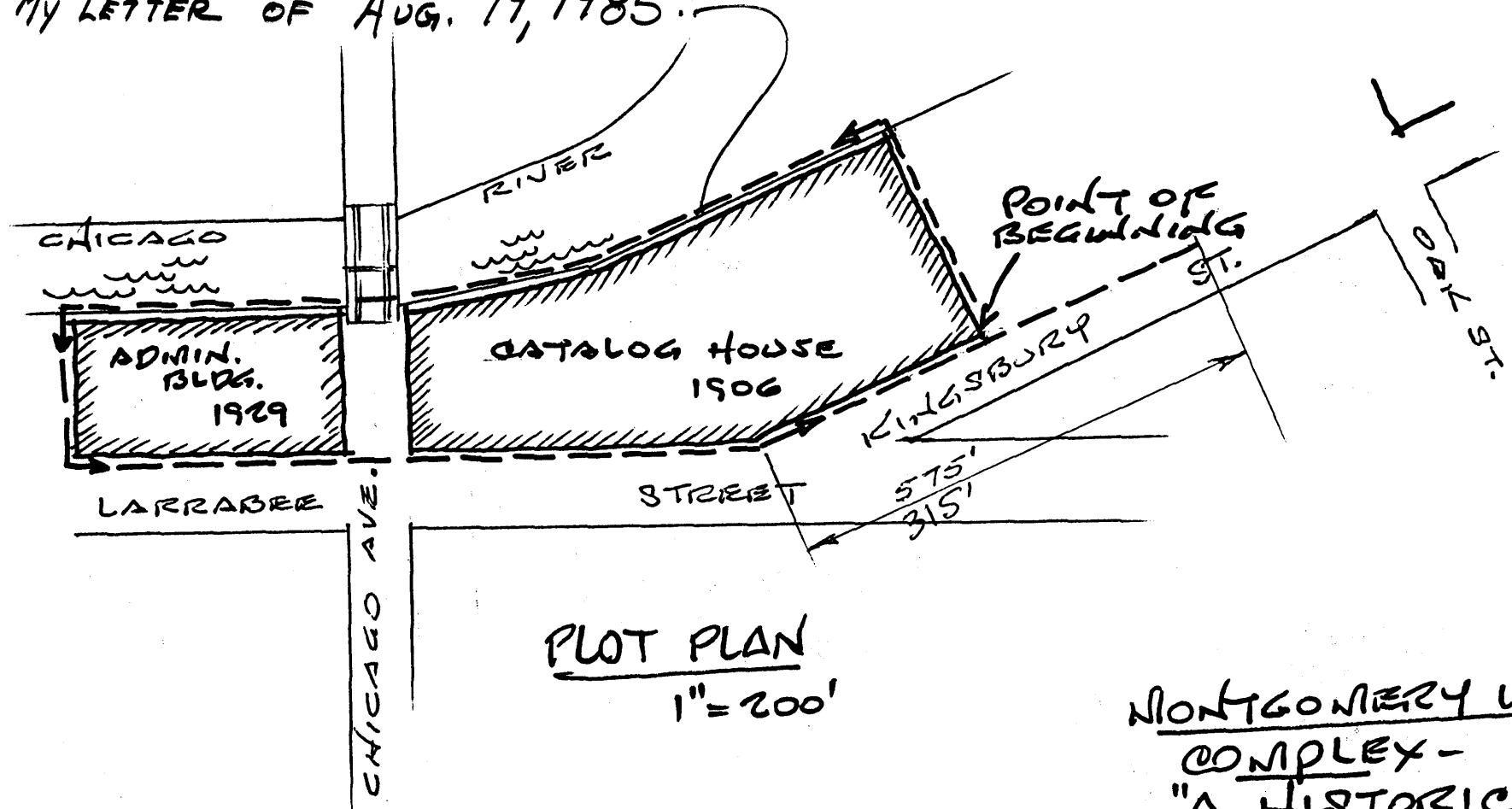
Nevins, Allan, The Emergence of Modern America, 1865-1878
(Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1971). Originally published
in 1927).

Siegel, Arthur (ed.), Chicago's Famous Buildings: A Photographic
Guide to the City's Architectural Landmarks and Other
Notable Buildings (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1965).

412

- BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION AS GIVEN IN NOMINATION FORM DATED MARCH 1977.

BOUNDARY MAP CORRESPONDING W. V.B.D. IN MY LETTER OF AUG. 19, 1985.



LOT PLAN
1" = 200'

MONTGOMERY WARD
COMPLEX -
"A HISTORIC
PLACE"

JULY 1985 SHEET 1 of 1

AMS