

Sears, Roebuck and Company Celebrating Diamond Jubilee

Chicago—UPI—It all started with nothing more than a mistaken shipment of watches, but in 75 years Sears, Roebuck & Co. has grown to the world's largest general merchandising firm.

The story of Sears, whose mail order catalogues have been household fixtures in many homes for three-quarters of a century, parallels to a large extent the retail and social history of the United States.

When Richard W. Sears was working as a railroad station agent in Redwood, Minn., the America of 1886 had only 38 states. About 65 per cent of the 58 million population lived in rural areas. The yearly national income was \$10 billion, compared with an estimated \$418 billion last year.

The company was born almost by accident. A jeweler in Redwood refused to accept

a shipment of watches from a Chicago jewelry firm. The enterprising Sears, then 23, bought the watches for a reduced price. He sold them—by mail—to agents up and down the line at handsome profits. He ordered more.

Within a few months, Sears was in business for himself as the R. W. Sears Watch Co., Minneapolis. The mail order trade grew so rapidly that he moved to Chicago the following year.

Hires Farmboy
There he hired an Indiana farmboy, Alvah C. Roebuck, to repair watches. Roebuck had worked as a watchmaker in Hammond, Ind., for \$3.50 a week and room and board.

Thus began one of the most famous business associations in the world. The firm became Sears, Roebuck & Co. in 1893. Sears' "wish books" quickly gained acceptance among rural families, who before

that time had bought most of their needs in local general stores.

While the earliest catalogues featured only watches,

Missile Launch Silos Contracted

Los Angeles—UPI—Two Los Angeles firms have received a \$61.7 million contract to begin work immediately on the nation's first Minuteman missile launch silos at Malmstrom Air Force Base, Mont.

Award of the contract to the George A. Fuller Co. and Del E. Webb Co., lowest of six bidders, was announced Tuesday by the Army Corps of Engineers.

Bids on the project, estimated to be about 150 underground launchers, were opened Dec. 13 but those were refused because they ran higher than the government was willing to pay.

A spokesman for the engineers said construction of the launchers for the three-stage solid fuel missile would begin immediately. The first Minuteman is due to become war-ready by 1962.

New York—UPI—Today's well-heeled American teenagers are spending \$10.5 billion annually on goods and services, according to a marketing research report.

the firm by 1895 turned out a 507-page book offering such items as shoes, suits, women's garments, wagons, fishing tackle, stoves, furniture, saddles, buggies and dishes.

It sold "heavyweight, nice soft finish, black" wool cheviot coats for \$4.98, men's suits for \$9.95, a "Stradivarius model violin" for \$6.10 and an \$8 brass banquet lamp for \$2.30.

Another early book offered a fully equipped Sears "motor buggy" for \$395 with "nothing to buy but gasoline" and capable of "all speeds from 1 to 25 miles per hour."

At the height of a patent medicine fad, the 1911 catalog listed blood purifiers, liver and kidney remedies and "pink pills for pale people."

The firm built one plant after another around the country to handle its steadily rising sales. But not all orders were filled with the greatest efficiency. One customer wrote:

"For heaven's sake, quit sending me sewing machines. Every time I go to the station I find another one there. You have shipped me five already."

Prime Roles
While Sears had a flair for selling, advertising and writing copy for the catalogue, two other personalities played a prime role in making the firm the \$4-billion-a-year giant it is today.

A Chicago clothing manufacturer, Julius Rosenwald, reorganized the company to operate on an economical and efficient basis. Rosenwald

bought into the company in 1895 and became its president in 1908.

Sears entered the retail business in 1925. Gen. Robert

E. Wood, then a vice president of the company and former quartermaster general in World War I, opened an experimental retail store in a corner of the Chicago mail order house.

It was an immediate success. Seven more stores were

opened before the end of the year, and 27 were in operation by 1928. By 1933, volume of the retail end of the business exceeded the mail order operations.

Today, 75 per cent of the company's \$4 billion in sales comes from retail store sales.

At the end of 1959, the company had 11 mail order plants, 734 retail stores and 913 catalogue outlets in the United States, 49 stores and eight sales offices in Latin America, and four mail order facilities, 37 retail outlets and 319 catalogue sales offices in Canada.

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