

Sears, Roebuck and Company: Leading America into a New Age of Consumerism

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Process Paper

How did you chose your topic?

From the start, we wanted to focus on a topic related to consumerism. Immediately we took an interest in John Wanamaker, and began to learn about his legendary department stores that helped turn shopping into an event for ordinary people. This caught our attention, and we decided to look more into America's first department stores. This led us to discover the fascinating topic of the Sears company, or, as it was called over a hundred years ago, Sears, Roebuck & Co. After some research, we decided that it would be an intriguing National History Day topic. We chose to focus on the company's three main leaders: Richard Sears, Julius Rosenwald, and Robert E. Wood, and the impact they had on American consumerism.

How did you conduct your research?

We began our research by obtaining any books that we could find about the history of the Sears company. We noticed that most of them mentioned the book *Catalogues and Counters* as their main source, and so we made it our mission to find it. When we did, it proved to be our most valuable source because it contained many other primary sources, such as letters, maps, and quotes. We also used the Library of Congress's Chronicling America newspaper database to find newspaper ads for Sears and Roebuck. We interviewed Gordon Weil, author of "Sears, Roebuck U.S.A.," and used that information to supplement our research. After we decided on a outline for our website we looked for sources more specific to the topics that we decided to cover.

How did you select your presentation category and create your project?

All three of us were interested in creating a website entry together from the beginning of our research, due the many options we would have in regards to editing, media, photos, layout, and design. This proved critical in presenting our topic in an effective manner as we began adding sections of the website. After dividing the workload up among teammates, we each added information on the varying tabs, beginning with the leaders. Later, we met regularly to polish the website, adding statistics and graphs, and writing our own custom HTML coding for certain interactive portions of the website. During this time, we added to the bibliography and continued to keep track of each primary and secondary source we encountered that would prove helpful to the understanding of our project.

How does your project relate to the NHD theme?

Before Richard Sears founded Sears, Roebuck and Co., the idea of a mail-order catalog was still a relatively new one. Sears took this idea and turned it into a business phenomenon. The marketing expertise of Sears, along with the organizational strategies

of Julius Rosenwald and retail knowledge of Robert Wood, helped turn Sears and Roebuck into one of the most successful companies of the early 1900s. Each man's unique skill set helped the company to achieve its great prosperity and prominence. Sears, Roebuck and Co. and its revolutionary catalog had a legacy of commercial success that indirectly led to the creation of online supply companies such as Amazon, and helped to change the way American consumers viewed the retail industry.

Word Count: 500