



## Raleigh's Kit Homes

In the early 20th century, several new neighborhoods sprang up on the outskirts of downtown Raleigh—Glenwood-Brooklyn, Boylan Heights, Cameron Park, Five Points, and Mordecai Place. Considered suburban at the time, the neighborhoods host a variety of housing styles. Architects and speculative builders certainly influenced the neighborhoods' development, but a new way of building was emerging. In 1906 Aladdin Homes of Bay City, Michigan, published its first kit home catalog, marking the beginning a phenomenon that engrossed the nation.

What were kit homes? Simply, kit homes were sets of building plans and materials purchased from a catalog. After selecting a model, practically everything needed to build your own house arrived via boxcar. It was then up to you (or your local carpenter) to put it together. Kit homes were not weekend DIY projects—most averaged 30,000 pieces. Still, having complete control over the style, materials, and construction process brought homeownership more within reach. Kit homes were more affordable than hiring an architect, and companies such as Sears, Roebuck & Co. offered generous financing packages to sweeten the deal. Those who could not previously afford a custom-built home could now choose from hundreds of options.

Kit home catalogs peddled a wide array of popular, sellable styles. The cozy bungalow is most often associated with the trend, but other selections included stately Tudor and Spanish Revivals, simple Cape Cods, and even "The Magnolia," a grand three-story Georgian with a two-story columned portico, porte-cochere, and eight rooms. Between 1908 and 1940, Sears sold approximately 75,000 kit homes; Aladdin sold approximately the same amount between 1906 and 1981. Today kit homes are found in large cities and small rural communities throughout the nation.



The Sears Walton model, from the 1921 Modern Homes catalog.



Photo by D. Strevell, Capital City Camera Club

Learn more about Raleigh's local kit homes, May 18<sup>th</sup> - 19<sup>th</sup>.

Given that Raleigh's first 'suburban' neighborhoods developed as the kit home industry took off, it is not surprising to discover a number of these architectural gems inside the beltline. As part of RHDC's 50th Anniversary, the commission is sponsoring an exhibit and lecture showcasing Raleigh's best-preserved kit homes. We hope that you will join us in exploring a few local examples of this uniquely American phenomenon! ■



## May is National Historic Preservation Month "Discover America's Hidden Gems"

Raleigh Historic Development Commission  
One Exchange Plaza, 3rd floor  
PO Box 829  
Raleigh, NC 27602  
email: rhdc@rhdc.org

## RHDC MEETINGS

### RHDC Business Meetings:

5/15, 6/19, 7/17, 8/21. 7:30 AM,  
Rm. 305, Avery C. Upchurch Gov't. Complex.

### Certificate of Appropriateness Committee:

(Application deadline & meeting date)  
5/18 for 6/4, 6/18 for 7/2, 7/23 for 8/6.  
4:00 PM, Rm. 305, Avery C. Upchurch Gov't. Complex.

### Community Awareness Committee:

6/5, 7/3, 8/7. 4:00 PM, Rm. 213, One Exchange Plaza.

### Research Committee:

6/7, 7/5, 8/2. 7:30 AM, Rm. 213, One Exchange Plaza.

## COMMISSION MEMBERS

Fred Belledin (Chair), Jane Forde (Vice-Chair), Greg Hatem (Sec'y/Treas.), Will Alphin, Jannette Coleridge-Taylor, Miranda Downer, Kiernan McGorty, Scott Shackleton, Michael Story, Cecily Timmons, Flora Hatley Wadlington, Barbara Wishy.

## COA TALLY

Major work (comm. review):	Dec. '11	Jan. '12	Feb. '12	Mar. '12
Approved as submitted	2	1		
Approved w/ conditions	3	2	5	5
Approved in part/ denied in part				
Denied				
Deferred	1	2		
Minor work (staff approved):	6	5	4	11

## EVENTS

### MADE TO ORDER: KIT HOMES IN RALEIGH

Join RHDC and leading Sears Modern Homes authority Rosemary Thornton as we explore Raleigh's treasure trove:

#### MADE TO ORDER: KIT HOMES IN RALEIGH

Friday, May 18, 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.  
Raleigh City Museum, 220 Fayetteville Street  
In partnership with the Raleigh City Museum, RHDC will host a reception launching the exhibit, Made to Order: Kit Homes in Raleigh.

#### THE HOUSES THAT SEARS BUILT IN RALEIGH

Saturday, May 19, 1:30—3:30 p.m.  
Rialto Theatre, 1620 Glenwood Avenue  
Learn about Sears Modern Homes from expert Rosemary Thornton.

#### MEET ROSEMARY: A BOOK SIGNING

Saturday, May 19, 3:30-4:00 p.m.  
Third Place, 1811 Glenwood Avenue  
Featuring Rosemary Thornton, author of *The Houses that Sears Built* and *Finding the Houses that Sears Built*. ■

## CONTACTS

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Historic Boylan Heights: www.boylanheights.org  
Downtown Raleigh Alliance: www.godowntownraleigh.com  
NC SHPO: www.hpo.ncdcr.gov

For information on historic preservation rehabilitation tax credits, contact the NC SHPO.

Staff support for the RHDC is provided by the Raleigh Department of City Planning, www.raleighnc.gov.