



Montgomery Ward Catalogue of 1895 (Dover Pictorial Archive)

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Tea gowns, bleached damask, and yards of flannel and pillow-case lace, stereoscopes, books of gospel hymns and ballroom gems, the New Improved Singer Sewing Machine, side saddles, anti-freezing well pumps, Windsor Stoves, milk skimmers, straight-edged razors, high-button shoes, woven cane carpet beaters, spittoons, the Studebaker Road Cart, commodes and washstands, the "Fire Fly" single wheel hoe, cultivator, and plow combined, flat irons, and ice cream freezers. What man, woman, or child of the 1890s could resist these offerings of the Montgomery Ward catalogue, the one book that was read avidly, year after year, by millions of Americans on farms and in small towns across the nation?

The Montgomery Ward catalogue provides one of the few irrefutably accurate pictures of what life was "really like" in the gay nineties, for it described and illustrated almost anything that anybody could possibly need or want in the way of "store-bought" goods. In fact, in that pre-department store era, it was usually the only source for such goods. Imagine if Montgomery Ward had issued an illustrated catalogue in the days of Louis XIV, or Elizabeth I, or Charlemagne: what insights would we have into the daily life of the "common folk," the farmers and shopkeeper, housewives and schoolchildren . . . what sources of information for historians and scholars, collectors and dealers, what models for artists and designers.

In 1895, Montgomery Ward was the oldest, largest, and most representative mail-order house in the country. The brainchild of a former traveling salesman, it issued its first catalogue in 1872, a one-page listing of items. By 1895, the catalogue, reprinted here, had grown to 624 pages and listed some 25,000 items, almost all of them illustrated with live drawings. Montgomery Ward was by then a multi-million dollar business that profoundly affected the American economy; and since it reached the most isolated farms and backwoods cabins, its effect on American culture was almost as great. Now once again available, it is our truest, most unbiased record of the spirit of the 1890s.

An introduction on the history of the Montgomery Ward Company and its catalogue has been prepared especially for this edition by Boris Emmet, Ph.D. (Johns Hopkins), a foremost expert on retail merchandising. His monumental work *Catalogues and Counters* has long been recognized as a landmark in the study of American economic history.

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