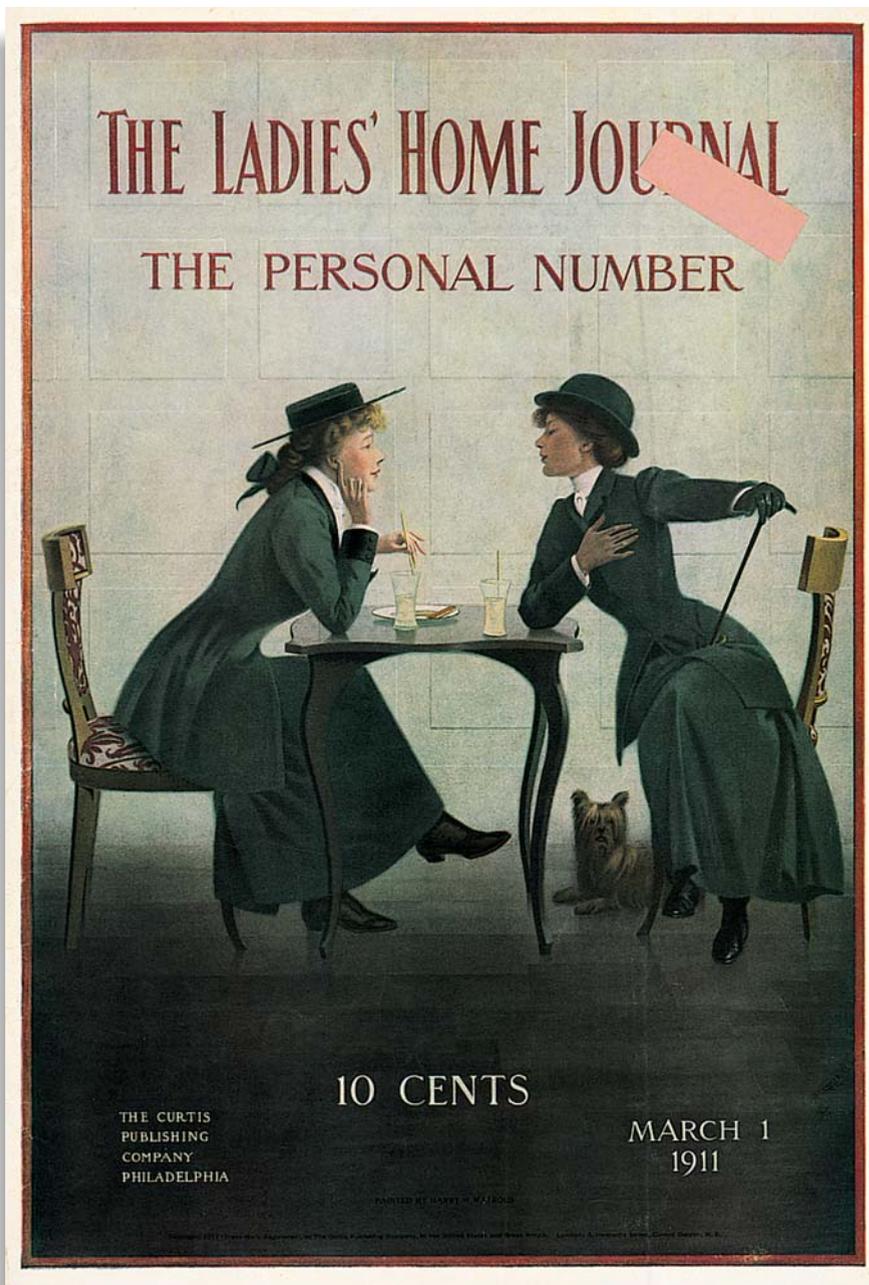


# The Ladies' Home Journal Bungalows

The popular publication began offering house plans a full thirteen years before Sears did.

BY ROBERT SCHWEITZER



IN 1915, GUSTAV STICKLEY'S THE CRAFTSMAN magazine boasted a circulation of 22,500. This publication is widely recognized today as one of the taste makers of the Arts and Crafts period for not only handcrafts but architecture as well; however, a much more prominent and influential tastemaker was a publication directed at middle class women; it was run for 30 years by a man named Edward Bok. In that same year, The Ladies' Home Journal's circulation topped 1,600,000 monthly copies making it the first mass circulation publication ever to reach so many Americans. Published by Cyrus Curtis of Philadelphia in 1883, The Ladies' Home Journal and Practical Housekeeper (the last three words were dropped in 1886) was not the first women's magazine, nor was it the first to offer house plans; but it turned out to be the best at doing both. One scholar has stated that the Journal took the business of mail-order houses to a new level and helped set the stage, with its marketing, for the likes of the Sears, Aladdin and Lewis kit homes that followed. The Journal began offering house plans for the models it

**left:**

*A cover dated March 1, 1911. In the early 20th century, it is estimated that 60% of all American women would read the Journal in an average month.*

featured in its magazine pages in 1895, a full 13 years before Sears. Just three years later they sold over 500 plans in one month.

The Ladies' Home Journal featured home plans from 82 nationally known architects such as Ralph Adams Cram, Edward Hapgood and Frank Lloyd Wright. Over the span of 25 years it illustrated 169 different houses. The majority of the early plans were traditional Colonials and English Tudors. Many of these could be purchased for the nominal fee of \$5, far below the normal fee of \$50 or 10 percent of the building cost. Stickley later adopted this low-price tactic for his Craftsman plans. The Journal homes contained many of the most modern features such as rooms with cross-ventilation, coal-fired central heating, hot water heaters and indoor plumbing with multiple bathrooms.

In the January 1904 issue, The Journal printed its first full article on the bungalow style. From then on the designs published in the magazine began to favor the California Arts and Crafts style. [Shelley: see figure LHJ1916P28T] Unlike other magazines, the Journal tended to show photographs of the featured homes rather than line drawings. This was due to its ability to employ better printing technology and Bok's idea of showing the reader that the house was actually build-able. By 1919, the bungalow plans had lost their West Coast look and took on a more Midwestern flavor. [Shelley: see fig LHJ1916P17B] Around World War I the Journal began publishing several books of house plans, many of which included bungalows. Illustrated here are excerpts from a rare 1916 Journal Bungalows plans book.



## THE LADIES' HOME JOURNAL PRIMER

Vintage issues of the publication are available from antiques and ephemera dealers and can be found on eBay.

### Books:

- *Magazines for the Millions: Gender and Commerce in The Ladies' Home Journal and the Saturday Evening Post 1880-1910* by Helen Damon-Moore, published by State University of New York Press, © 1994; sunypress.edu.
- *Ladies Home Journal Vintage Covers: A Poster Book* by Random House Value Publishing. Visit [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).
- *The Ladies' Home Journal Treasury* by John Mason Brown, published by Simon & Schuster, © 1956; [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).
- *Reformer in the Marketplace: Edward W. Bok and The Ladies' Home Journal* by Salme Harju Steinberg, published by Louisiana State University Press, © 1979; [amazon.com](http://amazon.com).
- Articles on the Journal and Bok can be viewed through the Google Scholar Web site and JSTOR (Online Journal Archive) available through many academic and public libraries.



Contributed by George Palmer Telling

It is very likely that this publication was the single most effective agent for disseminating ideas on house and home taste in the era.



right:

*Photo of Edward William Bok in the frontispiece to A Dutch Boy Fifty Years After. Several scholars believe that Bok had the single most effect popularizing the bungalow in America.*

### Edward Bok's Vision

The growing economic power of women in the late Victorian age as well as the growth in numbers and in affluence of a literate middle class spurred on a need for periodic literature. The *Journal* fulfilled that need. Monthly it reached an estimated 20 percent of all Americans in the early 20th century. In an age before radio and TV this represents a staggering number. It is estimated that 60 percent of all American women would read the *Journal* in a normal month. It is very likely that this publication

was the single most effective agent for disseminating ideas on house and home taste in the era.

Much of this is due to Edward William Bok—the son of an immigrant from the Netherlands who came to New York in 1870 at the age of seven. He became the *Journal's* editor in 1889 and remained at its head for 30 years. Bok was an advocate of the social reform movement of the time. In this “Progressive Era”

he advocated social, political and environmental reforms. Bok became enthralled with the idea of reshaping the single-family house, giving it new form and simplicity and making it available to a wider range of families. He wanted to make the services of professional architects available to the general public who could not normally afford them. The *Journal* house plans were generally reform-minded designs that appealed to conservative middle class interests.

Bok thought American homes in the 1880s were poorly designed. They were perhaps not ugly, but they were overly ornate and put too much money into non-practical decoration. Bok wanted those with limited means to still be able to have homes of professional good design. That is why he embraced the Arts and Crafts movement, was an enormous fan of England's William Morris and the bungalow

house, which strove for economy and simplicity. Several bungalow scholars believe that Bok had the single most effect popularizing the bungalow in America. The *Journal's* influence even reached the steps of the White House as President Teddy Roosevelt noted that Bok was the only man he knew who changed for the better the architecture of an entire nation!

The Ladies' Home *Journal*

played a significant role in making sensibly designed homes available to a large number of people in the early years of the 20th century. It reawakened in many Americans the dream of private home ownership. **LB**

