

INKLINGS and IDLINGS

The Newsletter of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association

313 East Third Street • Galesburg, Illinois 61401 • (309) 342-2361

Complimentary Issue 2004

The name, "Inklings and Idlings", comes from the title of Carl Sandburg's first column, printed in the *Galesburg Evening Mail* under the pseudonym "Crimson", in 1904.

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The Association's Purpose

The Carl Sandburg Historic Site is owned and staffed by the State of Illinois. However, not all that should be done to maintain the Site can be accomplished by the state alone.

Consequently, the nonprofit Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association came into being to meet some of the Site's needs. Since it was established, it has done much to enhance the Site.

But the Association's purpose is greater than that. It strives to keep the vision of Carl Sandburg alive by reminding people a son of working class immigrants achieved fame and greatness in the nation.

It also works toward that goal by sponsoring events at the Site, helping to welcome visitors, and providing them with materials that inform, educate and entertain.

This complimentary issue of "Inklings and Idlings" is meant to give the reader an idea of the content over the past several years. Regular editions of the newsletter give members of the

Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association up-to-date information about activities at the Site.

The Association also maintains a museum store in the Visitors' Center which stocks all in-print publications of Carl Sandburg's writings.

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When Carl Sandburg Was Born

Carl Sandburg was born on January 6, 1878, in Galesburg. One of the city's major employers 126 years ago was the Chicago, Burlington and Quincy Railroad Company. The locomotive department employed 499 men and the car department had 175.

August Sandburg, Carl's father, was employed by the railroad as a blacksmith's helper. His chief tool was a sledgehammer, which he wielded ten hours each day. For his effort, he was paid the princely sum of about \$1.50 per day, or approximately \$35 per month.

To feed his family, and to reduce his reliance on the grocery stores, August Sandburg planted and tended a large garden each year. The vegetables he harvested sustained his family through the winter months. To be sure, while the meals which resulted were nourishing, they seemed too reliant on carrots, potatoes and other root vegetables.

Carl's First Job

When he was eleven years old, Carl Sandburg obtained his first regular employment. He entered the service of the real estate firm of Callendar and Rodine. It was domiciled on the second floor of a building on Main Street, between Kellogg and Prairie.

Every weekday morning, at about 7:45, he would clean the office of the previous day's accumulated detritus.

That task done, Sandburg would take the two cuspidors Mr. Callender, Mr. Rodine, and their clients had filled. He took the spittoons to a hallway cubbyhole which had a faucet and cold running water. There he emptied, washed, and rinsed the cuspidors. Every few weeks or so, he would polish the receptacles to a high shine.

Each Friday Mr. Callender would give Sandburg twenty-five cents for his week's work. In present day money, that quarter was the approximate equivalent of five dollars. However one might value his pay, it was not a penny too much.

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The Sandburg Cottage

By Pete Creighton

Galesburg is justly proud of its original three-room Sandburg Birthplace. The fact that we have it, now nicely restored, we owe first of all to one very determined lady. And she found it just in time. It was in sad shape and about to be torn down in 1945 when she ended her search.

Enter Adda Gentry George, widow, of a Knox College professor. She

was a former English teacher at Galesburg High and later in Milwaukee. She remembered reading a newspaper column in the **Milwaukee Journal** written by Sandburg wherein he described being born in a little three-room frame house near the railroad tracks. His father, August, toiled 10 hours a day, six days a week in the car shops of the C.B.&Q. for a reported 14 cents an hour.

After retiring, Adda George moved back to Galesburg, her hometown. She was a graduate of Knox College, class of 1895. She was surprised that no one knew or cared about the location of the little birthplace. When asked, Sandburg's older sisters, Mary and Margaret, at first feigned ignorance of it, but Adda George persisted. They finally gave in and told her it was on East Third Street near the tracks. Mrs. George found it to be a very run-down tiny home at 331 East Third. The home in 1945 was that of an elderly immigrant woman who knew nothing of Sandburg. She was suspicious of Mrs. George's intentions.

But Adda George was triumphant. She had found her prize! She made a sign which read: "In this house famed poet Carl Sandburg was born" which she placed on the little house. The woman removed it. Adda replaced it with a permanent plaque on the terrace. The owner said the three-room house would be taken down soon.

Adda George quickly formed the Carl Sandburg Association, which raised funds to purchase the home site for \$1,200. She had to advance most of this to secure the home. Later donations repaid her. A board of directors was formed and the home was restored and opened to visitors. Gifts of

furniture, some from the Sandburg sisters, soon came in.

The dedication of the birthplace was Oct. 7, 1946. Sandburg himself did not attend the dedication. He first saw his restored birthplace in 1948, on his 70th birthday. He was surprised and grateful for this belated hometown recognition, according to Mrs. George. He spoke at Galesburg High School and was the house guest of Knox College President Lyndon Brown.

The State of Illinois did not assume custody of the birthplace until 1970. This was a great relief and benefit to Galesburg. Many valuable improvements have been made by the state, including the Visitors' Center and museum next door.

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Another Galesburg Author

During the 1880s Carl Sandburg played baseball with other boys of the neighborhood in the dusty street in front of his home. In a house on the opposite side of the street lived a lady who sat in her rocking chair on the porch when the weather was pleasant. She surely saw those boys at play and was reminded of her own children who were now grown up. Her name was Julia Carney.

In her younger days Mrs. Carney had written many poems. They were meant for children and the poems were known around the world, having been translated into a number of other languages. Nobody in Galesburg paid much attention. The teachers in the schools didn't teach the children about Julia Carney's poems and that she lived in Galesburg.

Julia Fletcher was born April 6,

1823, in Lancaster, Massachusetts, the daughter of Joshua and Nabby (Warren) Fletcher. Both of her grandfathers served in the War for Independence.

Julia became a teacher in both private and public schools in the East. She became a member of Universalist Church and wrote many verses and lessons for use in Sunday School. She also wrote the words for numerous hymns which were set to music by others. Some of those hymns were adopted by other denominations for use in their church services.

In 1849 she married the Reverend Thomas J. Carney. He served a number of pastorates in Maine, New York, Wisconsin and in 1858, they arrived in Galesburg. The family continued to live in Galesburg because Lombard College was located here. Mr. Carney died in 1871.

Mrs. Carney had nine children, four of whom died in infancy. Two of her sons became attorneys and practiced in Galesburg. Her son Fletcher served as Mayor of Galesburg in 1899 and 1900. He provided leadership in the establishment of the city light plant and also improved the city water system. The other son, James, studied for the clergy, but later became an attorney and practiced with his brother Fletcher. Both men were widely respected for their integrity and honesty.

Mrs. Carney died November 1, 1908, at the age of 85. About five years before Mrs. Carney's death **The Galesburg Republican-Register** reprinted on the front page an article from the **Chicago Tribune** honoring Mrs. Carney's eightieth birthday. "Little Things," possibly the most famous

poem written by Mrs. Carney, was included and the article explained that she wrote the poem in 1845 "to help her pupils understand the value of little things." Many years later, President Dwight Eisenhower's wife, Mamie, told Life magazine her favorite poem as a child was "Little Things."

LITTLE THINGS

Little drops of water,
Little grains of sand,
Make the mighty ocean
And the pleasant land.

So the little moments,
Humble though they be,
Make the mighty ages
Of eternity.

So our little errors
Lead the soul away
From the path of virtue,
Far in sin to stay.

Little deeds of kindness,
Little words of love,
Help to make earth happy
Like the heaven above.

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The Rissywarn

When cast iron stoves first came into homes in the late 1830s, some people thought they would be poisoned by the fumes. It quickly became obvious that the stoves were more efficient than fireplaces.

The Sandburg family had a stove in the kitchen of their home which was used for cooking and baking as well as heating. There was a reservoir on the stove which held water. The heat from the stove kept the water hot for dishwashing, cleaning and bathing.

As in many immigrant homes, there were words of both English and the language of the home country used. Sometimes the words were mangled in the translation and became "inside" jokes to family members. But the words stuck around for a long time.

The word "reservoir" was one of those words for the Sandburg family. The place on the stove that held the hot water became the "rissywarn". From French to English to Swedish is only a short vocal trip.

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Always the Young Strangers

Carl Sandburg marked his 75th birthday anniversary with the publication of his autobiography, *Always the Young Strangers*. The book covered the first twenty years of his life. He called it "an album of faces in my memory."

The book wasn't especially personal, but it did give a vivid picture of life in a Midwestern town of the 1880s and 1890s. The narrative described the life of an immigrant family with few resources other than their muscles, brains and determination.

On January 10, 1953, Carl Sandburg sat for two hours in Galesburg's O.T. Johnson Department Store signing copies of his book. It cost \$5.

Critics across the nation praised the book for its simplicity and descriptions of ordinary life.

Mrs. Mary Creighton, editor of *The Galesburg Post*, was delighted with the book. She wrote "It is Carl sitting on life's railroad train, looking out the window and describing it to us."