

INKLINGS and IDLINGS

The Newsletter of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association

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Carl Sandburg and the Nobel Prize

(Tomas Junglander is a Swedish businessman based in Stockholm. He grew up in Mjolby only a few miles from Apunna and Asbo, the respective birthplaces of Carl Sandburg's parents. He has written this article to explain the reason Carl Sandburg never received the Nobel Prize for Literature.)

"I imitated Sandburg as closely as I could."

Swedish writer and Nobel Prize winner, Harry Martinson, prior to perfecting his own style.

2004 marks the centenary of the birth of the Swedish writer Harry Martinson. His journey through life, from his beginnings as a foster child, through a period as a vagabond reduced to begging, followed by election to the Swedish Academy in 1949 and becoming the joint winner of the Nobel Prize in 1974 in Literature, is one of the most fascinating life stories in twentieth century Swedish literature.

Harry Martinson's first collection of poems, *Ghost Ship*, was published in 1929. It consisted of poems employing motifs that reflected the sea and the life of a seaman. In 1930, he contributed to an anthology of work by members of the writers' group known as Fem Unga (Five Young Writers). This book became

one of the ground-breaking works of modern Swedish literature.

MODERNISM

Modernism praised life, affirming the modern era, its machines and its pulsating power. It represented a freer view of love and sexuality and battled against clichés in all areas of life. The intention of poetry was not merely to provide enjoyment and an uncritical sense of calm, but rather to free humanity and intensify the experience of real life. The young poets abandoned traditional forms of poetry, and wrote in free verse, unfettered by conventional metric forms.

The impulses driving modernist literature in Sweden came from many sources including Russian poets, Finnish authors who wrote in Swedish and, above all, American poets in general and Carl Sandburg in particular.

SANDBURG AND MARTINSON

Martinson gained a dazzling mastery of the new poetic style, characterized by rich imagery. His poetry, like Sandburg's, often exhibited precise, concrete and detailed observation. Despite the sober tone of Martinson's poetry, his precise observations give the reader a sense of being present at the events depicted. His bold associations contributed to the capacity of his poetry to elicit powerful moods. The

combination of sweeping visions and exact details characterizes both Martinson and Sandburg.

Harry Martinson was the joint winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1974, while Carl Sandburg was nominated for the Prize at least five times--in 1940, 1947, 1949, 1952 and 1953--but never won it.

Sandburg and Martinson met once, during Sandburg's last visit to Sweden in 1959.

HOW WINNERS OF THE NOBEL PRIZE FOR LITERATURE ARE CHOSEN

The Swedish Academy founded in 1786 was assigned the task of choosing the winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1902. The Academy has 18 members who are elected for life.

To be eligible for the Nobel Prize, a candidate must be nominated by a suitably qualified person. The following are entitled to nominate candidates: Members of the Swedish Academy and other national academies worldwide, professors of literary and linguistic disciplines at universities, former winners of the Prize and presidents of authors' organizations.

All nominations must be supported by a motivation and are subject to total secrecy. In the process of choosing a winner, the Swedish Academy is assisted by a Nobel Committee comprised of three to five Academy members. The Committee's task is to prepare the ground for consideration of the candidates by registering, collecting and presenting nominations and commissioning various studies of the authors in question after which the Committee members make

recommendations to the Academy.

PRELIMINARY LIST OF CANDIDATES

After the Academy has approved the Committee's preliminary list, it requests the Committee to prepare a definitive list of approximately five priority candidates. During the summer, Academy members are required to read from the production of the shortlisted candidates. Many of the more prominent literary figures recur on the definitive list year after year. By the end of the summer vacation period, the Committee members are expected to have done their homework and in the first half of October the Academy reaches a decision. For the choice of the prizewinner at least twelve of the 18 members must cast their votes and a candidate must receive more than half of the votes cast.

SANDBURG THE CANDIDATE

As the Academy's expert on American literature and a member of the Nobel Committee, Per Hallstrom had a strong influence on whether Sandburg should receive the prize or not.

In his biography, you can read: "Pessimism is the basic chord in his writing and Schopenhauer his philosopher."

It was not unnatural that Hallstrom disliked the work of Sandburg. Sandburg the optimist who described America as a strong and wonderful country, including during the 1950s when the U.S. was not exactly popular among cultural celebrities in Sweden. Nevertheless, Sandburg had many supporters in Sweden and in 1950 he received an Honorary Doctorate

from the University of Uppsala. However, Sandburg did not come to Uppsala to receive the honor in person. This disappointed his supporters who had long backed Sandburg as a worthy candidate for the Nobel Prize. Accordingly, it is likely that his decision not to go to Sweden had a negative influence on his candidature.

PRIORITY CANDIDATE

Harry Martinson, on the other hand, after being elected to the Academy in 1949, himself nominated Sandburg for the Nobel Prize in 1953. At this time, Martinson was well aware of the procedures applied by the Academy, and as a result his nomination was well supported and Sandburg was probably one of the priority candidates that year. However, Winston Churchill was the eventual winner in 1953 followed by Ernest Hemingway in 1954.

Any list of the ten most famous writers never to have been awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature would be every bit as impressive as a list of the ten most famous winners of the prize. As well as Sandburg, those who did not make the grade include Leo Tolstoy, Marcel Proust, Graham Greene, Anton Chekhov, James Joyce, Joseph Conrad, Franz Kafka, Bertolt Brecht, August Strindberg and Henrik Ibsen.

The Primary Source: The Swedish Academy. All information regarding the Nobel Prize is classified for fifty years.

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Galesburg and Carl Sandburg

Galesburg has an uncommon, rich

heritage. Its founders came seeking religious freedom and to build a college. They were determined to provide educational opportunities to the next generations.

As the years passed, Galesburg's population became more diverse. New arrivals made major and unique contributions to the city's culture and its growth. Galesburg has been home to many outstanding and successful women and men. The best known of them is Carl Sandburg.

The year 2003 marked the 125th anniversary of his birth on East Third Street. There his ashes, and those of his wife, are buried. The Carl Sandburg Historic Site is owned and staffed by the State of Illinois. However, not everything necessary to maintain the Site and the legacy of Carl Sandburg is provided by the state.

The nonprofit Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association exists to meet some of those additional needs. It has done much to enhance the physical appearance and historic value of the Site.

But its purpose is greater than that. It strives to keep alive "The People, Yes!" vision of Carl Sandburg. It does that by reminding visitors how a son of working class immigrants achieved fame and greatness in the nation. As he did, so can the children of today.

The legacy of Carl Sandburg is his poetry and journalism, history and politics, and song and story. His work and writings still influence mankind today.

The Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association accomplishes its purpose by sponsoring events at

the Site, such as the Songbag Concert Series. These popular folk song concerts attract young and old alike. The Association has published an activity book for elementary school children. The booklet has been highly praised by teachers and parents. Visitors to the birth home and Visitors' Center can enjoy video presentations about Carl Sandburg and his work.

The Association has purchased artifacts and memorabilia connected to Carl Sandburg's writings and displayed them in the Visitors' Center. It publishes *Inklings and Idlings*, a newsletter which includes Association activities and articles about Carl Sandburg and his youthful days in Galesburg.

The stories provide background about the influences on him which appeared in his writings at a later time. The title of the newsletter is taken from a column which Sandburg wrote for a local newspaper, one of his first journalistic efforts.

The Association maintains a shop whose inventory includes most of the published works currently in print by Carl Sandburg. Mementos of the Carl Sandburg Site are also available for purchase.

The Sandburg Days Festival occurs the second weekend of May each year. The Site provides a venue for concerts and childrens' activities. Other events are scheduled in various locations in city.



The home where poet, historian and author Carl Sandburg was born on January 6, 1878
www.sandburg.org