

# INKLINGS and IDLINGS

The Newsletter of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association

313 East Third Street • Galesburg, Illinois 61401 • (309) 342-2361 • www.sandburg.org

Summer, 2006

## Annual Meeting

In accordance with Article III of the By-Laws of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association, the annual meeting of the organization will be held at 7:00 p.m., Tuesday, July 11, 2006, at the Visitors' Center, 313 East Third Street, Galesburg, Illinois.

At that time, officers and directors of the Association will be elected for the ensuing year, and such other business as may properly come before the Association will be transacted.

Light refreshments will be served. All members are encouraged to attend.

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## Summer Hiatus

The Songbag Concert Series has completed another successful season. The performers were especially good and audiences enjoyed their music very much.

John Heasley is planning next year's programs. Look for more details in the next issue of *Inklings & Idlings* which will appear in early September.

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## Outta Site

The Sandburg Days Festival at the Site was a great success with the return of the Mike and Amy Finder Band. Refreshments of pie ala mode catered by the Bishop Hill Colony Bakery received many compliments.

The Spoon River Creative Writers gave poetry and prose readings at the Site for both the Sandburg Days Festival and Railroad Days.

Congratulations are extended to Ted Williamson who won second place at Lewistown's Edgar Lee Masters Poetry Contest with Marilyn Carr and Jane Carman each receiving honorable mentions. I'm sure Carl would have been proud.

As spring has transitioned into summer, visitor attendance has increased.

Kristy McGunigal, our summer employee, has been painting the picket fence which encloses the Site. She is careful in her work and does not drip paint on the flowers or the grass.

Steve Holden, the Site Manager, is recovering well from surgery and expects to return to work sometime in July.

—Bert McElroy

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## **"Inklings & Idlings"**

The Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association has published a newsletter for many years. On occasion it has been published regularly and on other occasions it has been irregular.

The name "Inklings and Idlings" derives from a column Carl Sandburg wrote in *The Galesburg Evening Mail* while he was attending Lombard College.

Since February, 1999, I have been editing and writing articles for the newsletter five times a year. It is usually eight pages per issue. Once a year, it contains twelve pages. The reason for publishing an odd number of times per year is that the editor isn't able to find time to do six issues.

The aim of the publication is to share news and information about the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site as well as articles about the life of the poet and the town where he was born.

It has been my intent to give readers an idea of what Galesburg was like when Carl Sandburg was growing up. Occasionally, there are short excursions into his career as an adult. His experiences at school, at work, within his family and in the world at large, gave him a "life view" which later contributed to all his writing.

Over the years, readers have commented that the newsletter "sounds like Carl Sandburg"—a very high compliment indeed.

I welcome articles from readers. Space limitations may require they be edited.

—Barbara Schock,  
Editor

## **The Class of 1896**

Carl Sandburg didn't go to public school after the eighth grade. Like many boys in the 1890s he was caught in the economic hard times following the Panic of 1893. It was almost a decade before the country and its people recovered.

Sandburg didn't attend his eighth grade graduation in 1892 because he didn't have a good suit of clothes to wear to the ceremony. The money was needed to feed and house the rest of the family.

His older sister, Mary, had much better grades than did Carl. Consequently, their parents decided she would benefit more from additional education. In time she became a teacher, and later, a nurse.

Teenage boys of the time who did not go on to high school were expected to find a paying job so they could contribute to the household income. Of course, the jobs were menial and unpleasant with long hours.

The fortunate ones were able to continue their education at Galesburg High School. The three-year course of study included mostly classical studies. The idea of vocational classes was just beginning to be adopted by high schools in the Midwest.

Since this is the 110<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Class of 1896, we chose to honor them in this article. High school commencement exercises followed a similar pattern in many communities. The students were expected to write and present an essay on a topic which they had chosen. The proud parents and siblings sat through the long session of readings. The weather was usually hot and humid.

The Class of 1896 consisted of 43 students (29 girls and 14 boys) as graduation day arrived. In the fall of 1893, the class had begun its high school days with ninety boys and girls.

The valedictorian was Dora Adelle Townsend and the salutatorian was Josephine Coolidge. Members of the class were noted for their musical and elocutionary talent. Some of the boys excelled at track, football and baseball.

The graduation ceremony was held at 2:00 p.m. on Friday afternoon, May 29<sup>th</sup>, in the auditorium of the High School. Invitations had been printed by the Evening Mail Press. One page listed the time and place of the exercises and a second page was printed with the autographs of the graduates. They were bound in parchment and tied with white and yellow ribbons denoting the class colors. The class didn't have a motto or flower as they didn't believe in that sort of thing.

Thirty-four members of the class gave orations during the program, interspersed with music played by the school orchestra. Nine asked to be excused; otherwise the program would have been even longer.

Miss Coolidge spoke on "Illinois in the Revolution." Elsie Davidson took as her subject "Lincoln in Galesburg," a description of the Lincoln-Douglas Debate. Fred Harris talked about the revival of the Olympic Games which occurred that year. Julie Lombard chose to describe the formation of woman's clubs across the nation. Other topics included child labor, Jane Addams, military drills, ethics and flowers.

Miss Townsend, the valedictorian, read her version of the opening verses of Virgil's "Aeneid," which was reprinted in the newspaper report of the event. She used an English

translation of the Greek text to prepare her poem. Everyone must have been impressed.

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### Keeping Cool

The residents of Galesburg had few ways to keep cool during hot summer weather in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Well-to-do families could go to their summer cottages, or even the seashore or the mountains. Those forced to stay at home drew the shades on windows and tried to regulate the flow of cooler air through the house.

A nice cool glass of lemonade was a temporary solution. A cardboard fan with an advertisement printed on it from a local funeral home was useful, but required constant effort. Wire mesh wasn't invented until 1900 so the flies and other insects had free access to every room of the house. The screened porch became popular later.

Clever folks invented foot-powered fans, but someone had to keep it in motion. A three-bladed fan was patented in 1889 which ran on electricity. It's doubtful three blades provided much movement of air anyway.

Fashion required layers of clothing, mostly of wool. There were no shorts and no t-shirts worn in public.

In 1911 rudimentary air conditioning was first used in candy factories to reduce humidity. In the 1920s, it was introduced in movie theaters and the public flocked to them. One could enjoy the "pictures" and be comfortable at the same time.





After World War II, air conditioning of homes became more common. Today, we can move from one air conditioned space to another, including our automobiles.

The Glenwood Ice Company coming up the street would have been an inviting sight in the 1890s, especially if one had the money to buy some of the quickly melting product.

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### **Dioramas**

In *Always the Young Strangers* Carl Sandburg wrote about seeing the diorama of the Battle of Gettysburg during his grade school days. Apparently, his teacher had encouraged the students to go to the Auditorium on North Broad

Street to see the presentation even though admission was five cents.

The battle of Gettysburg was the most memorable of the Civil War. General Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia marched into Pennsylvania, its northern-most foray of the entire war.

The battle began July 1<sup>st</sup> and ended July 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1863, with thousands and thousands of dead and wounded men. Decades later the battle is still studied by academics and relived by re-enactors. There has always been a fascination with events of that time and place.

President Lincoln delivered an address later that year at the dedication of the cemetery where the dead had been buried. It is memorized and repeated at patriotic events to this day.

From the description Sandburg gave, the "diorama" was a series of painted canvas panels which showed the battle lines and events during those three days. A narrator pointed to various features as he described the scene.

The word "diorama" was coined by Louis Daguerre (considered the father of photography) in 1822 in France. It was a way to show historical events, nature scenes and pictures of famous places in a three-dimensional mode. Dioramas and panoramas became popular entertainments in the 1800s. It enabled the public to learn about and experience far away places and historical events. Before the spread of photography the painted scenes were as close as a person could experience the world beyond his or her immediate surroundings.

We can still see dioramas at natural history museums. They are a convenient way to show animals in their natural habitat. The diorama of the City of Chicago in the Chicago History Museum has been a popular exhibit with young and old for decades.

As he watched, Sandburg became more interested in the ragged paintings and the slovenly presenter. In his mind he wondered if the man had a family. He correctly surmised that the man was bored with his job. Sandburg did remember the result of the Battle of Gettysburg: Reynolds won and Pickett lost.

As he was later to learn, John Reynolds had been killed on the first day of the battle, and George Pickett's charge against the Union troops killed a staggering number of Confederates. And, of course, General George Meade was victorious and Robert E. Lee badly defeated.

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### The Jubilee Singers

During their tenth season the Jubilee Singers of Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee, appeared at the Opera House in Galesburg. They gave two concerts on May 30<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, 1881. The first concert attracted a full house and the second was nearly as well attended.

The audiences appreciated the songs of the group as well as individual singers. There were humorous songs, patriotic songs, ballads and religious songs in the program.

During the second concert the Singers presented spirituals which were well received by the listeners. *The Republican-Register* reported "All the selections sung at the concert were of such a character that one never tires of listening to them so intensely dramatic, so expressive of real emotion were they."

The Jubilee Singers was composed of nine students from Fisk University. All but two were former slaves. They set out on their first concert tour in October, 1871, to raise money to keep their school open. The route they followed was symbolic of the Underground Railroad which saved the lives of many slaves prior to the Civil War. Thee choir appeared only in states which had supported the Underground Railroad.

On May 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>, 1881, the Jubilee Singers had appeared in Springfield, Illinois, and were denied accommodation by the local restaurants and hotels. When this became known the Mayor and other residents of the city arranged for the members of the choir to stay in homes.

The widespread anti-black sentiments in many

northern communities at that time did not make it easy for the Jubilee Singers to perform. They were accepted as human beings much more readily in Europe and performed in those countries for several years. They sang for Queen Victoria and other royalty as well as ordinary people.

They were the first group to share the songs of slaves with the public. Through the concerts they gave in this country and in Europe, they were able to preserve their musical and religious heritage.

Carl Sandburg would have appreciated the Jubilee Singers as he had a love of the traditional songs which he eventually published as a book: *The American Songbag*.

The Jubilee Singers still perform today and represent their university all over the country and the world.

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### **Strawberry Shortcake**

*The Republican-Register* of June 11, 1881, published directions for shortcakes and suggestions for several types of fruit to put on them. Each of the recipes was for a biscuit-type shortcake. Spongecake hadn't been invented yet. Some of the recipes called for lard and others used butter for the shortening. Some used sweet milk and others used buttermilk.

The home baker was instructed to mix the dough and handle it lightly. The dough was rolled out into two circles which were fitted into a cake pan for baking. The large biscuit was split after baking and the strawberries were spooned between the layers and on top.

When the strawberry season was finished, the homemaker could prepare raspberry shortcake, followed by peach, huckleberry and blackberry. Summer menus could be filled with the fruits of the season on shortcake.

Surely the Swedish families of Galesburg ate their share of the summer bounty from gardens and orchards.

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### **The Crime of Skinny-Dipping**

Nowadays, women and men are locked up in the local jail for a number of reasons. Usually, they have been arrested for having committed serious crimes, such as assault, robbery, or murder. Some have had illegal drugs in their possession.

More than a century ago, one could be put behind bars for far less serious offenses. In those times, cocaine was a perfectly legal drug. Its use was deplored, but its possession was not a jailable offense. However, one could go behind bars for the effects of using another legal drug. That was alcohol.

Many men, and a few women, were taken into custody for being found in a state of intoxication on the public streets. Some, after a period of overindulgence, would engage in brawls, or beat their spouses. Those were serious offenses, but they did not reach the level of the criminal activity of today. Few serious malefactors ever were guests of the Galesburg authorities.

Carl Sandburg and some of his friends were once arrested for skinny-dipping in a pond just inside the city limits. They were loaded into the patrol wagon and taken to the city jail on South



Cherry Street. Fortunately, they were spared the humiliation of being seen by friends as they were transported to durance vile.

Being locked up was an experience Sandburg never forgot. His most vivid recollection was of the others already incarcerated. They were all there because they had been arrested for public drunkenness.

They were recovering painfully from their overindulgence of the night before. The fragrance of whiskey emanated from them, and a few had become physically ill. Sandburg described the city calaboose as a "hot, stinking place."

He and his friends were released after a few hours, so they did not experience an overnight stay. That would have been enlivened by the rats who appeared after the sun set.

On at least one occasion, an effort was made to poison the rats. The poison had done its work, but the rats decided to die in inconvenient locations. The places in which they expired were made apparent only after they had been dead for several days. The human residents of the jail claimed the live rates were less of a nuisance than their dead comrades.

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### Self Education

After Carl Sandburg left eighth grade, he knew that he would have to educate himself by reading books in his free time. Whenever possible he would read anything that came his way. He also read the newspapers because they put him in touch with the world outside

Galesburg.

One of his favorite places was the Young Men's Christian Association. The Y.M.C.A. maintained two large rooms on the second floor of a building near Main and Prairie Streets.

The tables in the rooms held copies of magazines which Sandburg enjoyed reading. Available for use were chess and checker boards. The latter was his best liked indoor game, and he developed real proficiency at it.

The "Y" also maintained a small library, mostly filled with books intended to improve their readers. The nature of improvement one volume provided was open to question.

It was entitled *The Life of Mason Long, Gambler*. The first half of the book contained information about the ways gamblers cheated, manipulated playing cards, and deceived their victims. The second half recounted Long's reform, and his life as a Christian.

The pages of the first half were dirty and dog-eared. It was obvious they had been perused many times. Those of the second half were almost pristine in their cleanliness. That was a clear indication they were almost wholly unread.

What lessons the reader derived from Mason Long's early life cannot be known. Still, it is unlikely they were of a kind which would be endorsed by the Y.M.C.A.

Apart from the volumes at the Y.M.C.A., Sandburg read the newspapers. He had established that habit fairly early

Like many boys over the years, Sandburg had a newspaper route in his youth. Actually, he had two of them. In the evening, he would deliver

the *Galesburg Daily Republican-Register*. In the morning he would distribute a number of Chicago papers.

The latter would arrive on the Fast Mail train. It did not stop in Galesburg, but it slowed as it approached the station on South Seminary Street. Bundles of newspapers would be tossed from one of the cars. The newsboys would retrieve and open them, and take the papers to their customers to read.

At that time, there were six Chicago morning newspapers, including the *Tribune*, the *Times*, the *Record*, the *Inter-Ocean*, the *Herald* and the *Chronicle*. He read them all, at least in part.

*The Tribune* was prized by Republicans, while

the *Times* was the paper of choice among Democrats. If a household could afford to take two morning papers, the second was almost always the *Record*. It had a reputation for impartiality. It was said one read the *Tribune* or *Times* for their politics, but one read the *Record* for the news.

The *Record* was published by Victor Lawson. Although he could not have known it at the time, Carl Sandburg would one day be employed by the publisher. However, it would not be on the Chicago *Record*. Instead, for many years he would have a place on Lawson's afternoon paper, the *Chicago Daily News*.

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**Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association**  
313 East Third Street  
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*See the photo of the Glenwood Ice  
Company Cart from the Galesburg Public  
Library on page 4.*