

# 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

Spring, 2007

## Two by Two

Two more new members of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association are being welcomed in this issue of *Inklings and Idlings*. They are:

Mary Eyre-Cerkez  
Sharon Pirkel

We hope they will enjoy reading the newsletter, visit the Site frequently and participate in many of the activities offered by the Association.

Let's hope there will be two new members, at least, to report in every issue.

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## Songbag Concerts Continue

Chris Valillo will appear April 19<sup>th</sup> in the Barn at the Carl Sandburg Historic Site, 313 East Third Street. He has been a favorite of Songbag Concert goers for a number of years. His music is always enjoyable.

On May 17<sup>th</sup> Lee Murdock will do the performing. Remember, the Songbag Concerts begin at 7:00 p.m. and delicious refreshments are served.

For those who enjoy folk and acoustic music, the Songbag Concerts are a delight. A voluntary \$2 contribution is appreciated which helps to pay expenses. However, it is not required.

## Outta Site

Events for the 2007 Sandburg Days Festival have already begun. With the addition of "The Big Read" of John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, there are numerous opportunities to participate. These include discussion groups, dramatic presentations and seminars led by Steinbeck scholars. Some of the highlights are listed in the next article.

Looking over the last paragraph, I think you might wonder what is the Sandburg-Steinbeck connection. Carl was an older contemporary of John. Both wrote about the plight of the common man. When Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize for Literature, he said that the prize really belonged to Sandburg.

Personally, I am very excited about the Kickoff and subsequent performances of Marc Kelly Smith. Marc is the founder of the Poetry Slam movement. He is very well known in Chicago, where he performs regularly at the Green Mill Lounge.

Marc has developed an engrossing program entitled "Sandburg to Smith, Smith to Sandburg." An abbreviated version of the program will occur at 7 p.m. at the Site as the Festival Kickoff on April 26<sup>th</sup>. The full length program will be performed at the Studio Theater at Knox College at 4:00 p.m. on Friday, April 27<sup>th</sup>.

The poetry performance is backed by jazz improv

musicians, adding much to the mood of the poetry. Put on your listening ears to detect one S. from the other S.! Marc is also organizing a Poetry Slam at Cherry Street Restaurant at 7:30 p.m. on the same Friday. This will involve highly competitive poet-performers from a wide region around the state. There is an entrance fee for all competitors.

All of the events involving Marc Kelly Smith in the Sandburg Days Festival for the Mind are sponsored by the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency through the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site, Knox College and the Sandburg Festival Committee.

In case you haven't noticed, I am really excited about this year's Festival events.

– Steve Holden, Site Manager

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### **Sandburg Days Festival Events**

Here is a list of some of the events planned for the Sandburg Days Festival. You can find further details in the newspaper or brochures distributed throughout the city.

*April 19, 6:30 p.m.*

Free movie screening "The Grapes of Wrath"  
Carl Sandburg College Theater

*April 24, 12 noon*

Steinbeck Scholar Robert DeMott speaks at Carl Sandburg College

*April 24, 4:00 p.m.*

Steinbeck Scholar Robert DeMott speaks at Knox College, Alumni Room

*April 25, 6:30 p.m.*

Steinbeck Scholar Robert DeMott speaks at Galesburg Public Library

*April 26, 6:30 p.m.*

Carl Sandburg College Poetry Contest Awards Ceremony  
CSC Student Center

*April 26, 7:00 p.m.*

Rootabaga Jammers perform music from the Big Band Era  
American Legion Post 285, 571 E. North Street

*April 27, 9:00 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.*

Writer's Workshop led by Jane L. Carman  
Carl Sandburg Historic Site, 313 E. Third Street

*April 27, 7:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m.*

Jazz of the 1930s  
Best Western Prairie Inn Lounge, I-74 and E. Main Street

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### **Sunday Afternoon at the Site**

For several years now, John Heasley has coordinated the Songbag Concert series. Almost all have been held on the third Thursday of the month.

Megan Scott and Brian Tibbets devised a lecture series to be held on Sunday afternoons. They have been a great success, reflecting credit on the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association.

The most recent presentations were "The Da Vinci Code in Old Main" by Lance Factor on January 21<sup>st</sup>; "Herndon's Lincoln" by Rodney Davis and Douglas Wilson on February 18<sup>th</sup> and "The People, Yes" by Mark Dvorak on March 18<sup>th</sup>.

It is to be hoped the series can be continued because it is the kind of contribution the Association hopes to make to the community.

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### **Bickerdyke Rededication**

A year ago a great deal of interest was created on the hundredth anniversary of the erection of the bronze memorial to Mother Bickerdyke on the Knox County Court House lawn. The Knox County Board subsequently had the statue restored to its original condition.



Mary Ann Ball Bickerdyke was a nurse through the entire Civil War 1861-1865. She lived in Galesburg at the time the war began and volunteered to help sick and wounded soldiers in the Union Army.

The public is invited to attend a rededication of the monument on the Court House lawn, 200 S. Cherry Street, Galesburg, Illinois. The ceremony will be held on Saturday, May 12, 2007, at 1 p.m.

The Knox County Board and the Cottage Hospital School of Nursing Historical Committee are hosting the event.

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### **Post Office Art**

Many post offices across the state of Illinois have frescos, murals, sculptures and reliefs which were created during the Great Depression. Between 1933 and 1943 there were several arts programs conducted by the federal government. They provided work for artists and added beauty to public buildings. They are a legacy that is underappreciated today.

When a new post office was constructed in a community, the U.S. Treasury Department set aside one percent of the building's cost for decorating. Artists were then selected to create works of art to go into the buildings. The artists were expected to visit the community to learn about its history and to talk to prominent individuals about the subject of the art work.

Since Carl Sandburg was a well known native of Illinois, his likeness was included in two of the post offices. The Decatur Post Office has six frescoes in the lobby. Sandburg is depicted along with Frank Lloyd Wright, John Deere and Colonel Francis Parker. The work was done by Edgar Britton in 1938 and the commission was \$2,400, which would be more than \$32,500 in today's dollars.

The Uptown Station at 4850 North Broadway in Chicago has ceramic tile murals created by Henry Varnum Poor in 1943. Carl Sandburg and Louis Sullivan are pictured in the murals.

In Knox County, the Abingdon and Galesburg

Post Offices were built during the Depression and benefitted from the arts program.

Mary Emma Thompson, Ph.D., of Westfield, Illinois, has compiled a list of all the post office art in Illinois with details about the artists, dates and cost. If you are interested in visiting post offices across Illinois to see this artistic legacy, you can order a copy of the illustrated pamphlet from Dr. Thompson, 425 S. Division Street, Westfield, IL 62474-1237. The cost is \$10 plus \$2 for mailing.

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### ***Wrinklings and Wild Things***

( In recognition of The Big Read's *Grapes of Wrath*, I have selected this section of verse 56 from Sandburg's *The People, Yes*.--Steve Holden)

The people pause for breath, for wounds and bruises to heal,  
For food again after famine, for regaining stamina,  
For preparations and migration to greener pastures, to canaan, to america, to the argentine, australia, new zealand, alaska,  
To farflung commonwealths lacking precedent or tradition.  
They guess and toil and rest and try to make out and get along  
And some would rather not talk about what they had to go through  
In the first years of finding out what the soil might do for them,  
In the first winter of snow too deep for travel, or  
The first summer when the few clouds showing went away without rain, or  
The day the grasshoppers came and tore a black path where the crops had stood.

The people is a monolith, a mover, a dirt farmer,

a desperate hoper.

The prize liar comes saying, "I know how, listen to me and I'll bring you through."

The guesser comes saying, "The way is long and hard and maybe what I offer will work out."

The people choose and the people's choice more often than not is one more washout.

Yet the strong man, the priceless one who wants nothing for himself and has his roots among his people,

Comes often enough for the people to know him and to win through into gains beyond later losing, Comes often enough so the people can look back and say, "We have come far and will go farther yet."

The people is a trunk of patience, a monolith.

"And the king wanted an inscription good for a thousand years and after that to the end of the world?"

"Yes, precisely so."

"Something so true and awful that no matter what happened it would stand?"

"Yes, exactly that."

"Something no matter who spit on it or laughed at it there it would stand and nothing would change it?"

"Yes, that was what the king ordered his wise men to write."

"And what did they write?"

"Five words: THIS TOO SHALL PASS AWAY."

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### **The Sandburg Collection**

(Charles Bednar wrote this special report for *Inklings and Idlings* about a visit to the University of Illinois Library by several members of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association.)

Friday, January 12, 2007, was a unique occasion

to begin the new year for a cadre of Carl Sandburg enthusiasts who visited the Carl Sandburg Special Collections held by the University of Illinois Library in Urbana.

Our arrangements were generously made by Gene Rinkel, retired curator of the Rare Book and Special Collections Library, who hosted the event. In addition, we were greeted by newly appointed Valerie Hotchkiss, head of the Rare Book and Manuscripts Library as well as Christopher Jones, staff coordinator of the recent computer-generated inventory of the collection and Bob Blissard, volunteer assistant curator.

Our entourage consisted of Steve Holden, Bert McElroy, Rex Cherrington and Chuck Bednar. We were joined by Rick Bednar who lives in Champaign. The acquisition of the enormous collection of Sandburg materials was a significant event in the history of the University of Illinois Library.

“In 1956 the University of Illinois acquired the collection of Sandburg’s books, writings, correspondence and memorabilia for the Special Collections Branch of the Library. The principal individual responsible to the acquisition was Bruce Weirick, who was a long-time member of the English Department and a friend of Carl Sandburg’s from the 1920s. Through his efforts, the University of Illinois Foundation unanimously approved \$30,000 for “The Carl Sandburg Collection of Books and Manuscripts.”\*

The entrance to the special collections wing consists of a large spacious hall from which glass enclosed reading rooms comprise the accommodations. The reception desk flanks these rooms adjacent to the entry.

Our first glimpse of the Sandburg holdings was a special exhibit relating to his Galesburg years.

Most striking was his first published book, *In Reckless Ecstasy*. The flyleaf was inscribed by Carl to his sister Mary. This rare book was accompanied by another early book *The Plaint of the Rose*.

A first issue of the *331 Memo*, January 6, 1961, was displayed along with other clippings, articles, photographs and letters about the early restoration of the birthplace and describing the dedication of the house in 1946. Adda George and two Sandburg sisters were pictured in a photograph at the event. After looking at the early Galesburg material, Gene led us into a large conference room. Here his staff had accumulated a number of Sandburg materials which we had previously requested to see.

The highlight was reading approximately twenty early Sandburg letters which were recently gifted by the family of Eric Johnson. Eric, a native of Galesburg was the only child of Carl’s sister, Mary. At an early age, Eric’s father died, leaving his Uncle Carl to become the paternal image in his life. A graduate of Knox College and WWII veteran, he became a successful businessman in Southern California. He had fond recollections of growing up, with Carl pinch-hitting for his dad. In later years, his first and only visit to the University of Illinois Library to see the Sandburg Collection was in June, 1997. During this visit Gene showed him all of his mother’s correspondence to Carl throughout the years of Eric’s youth. It was a very emotional moment when Eric began reading this family correspondence. In retrospect to the Sandburg Collection, Carl is known to have saved everything in letters and correspondence throughout his life—even including “crank letters.”

Realizing the historic value of his mother’s early letters from Carl, it was Eric’s wish at his death that these manuscripts be gifted to the University. This occurred upon his death in 1999. Today they

are known as the "Eric Johnson Collection." The letters were written from numerous places throughout the country to Mary as Sandburg traveled selling stereoptic views in states such as New Jersey, New York, Delaware and Wisconsin.

For over an hour we were privileged to carefully look over these letters with readings given by individuals of excerpts which particularly caught our eye. The familiar writing style Sandburg was later famous for was often recognized in the content. The sentence structure was frequently melodic with rhythmic passages shadowing on the verge of prose. Currently unpublished, they provide revealing insights into the development of a writing style that would become known worldwide.

We viewed a potpourri of messages and notes, short, cryptic, undated and unsigned, all in Sandburg's hand. Gene explained that these were often used in his writing, stashed in files or posted on bulletin boards. They were his research tools and reference notes—all important to him in his writing. Bob explained that these notes, presently unidentified, may in the future be an important source in the interpretation and understanding of Sandburg's writings.

Another file contained typescript notes of variations to Sandburg's most famous poem *Fog*. We were surprised to read different word compositions that Sandburg considered before the final draft. These files contained only copies of the handwritten fair copy of *Fog* which was written to Otto Harbach. Others had urged Sandburg for handwritten copies but in later years he refused all requests.

A striking one-page creed got our attention. It was written to a friend, Reuben Borough, and among those letters we were privileged to read. The creed is an early dissertation by Sandburg on the values

of life and shows a profound understanding of the world around him.

After our morning session, Gene took us on a tour of the archive stacks. It was the highlight of the afternoon. The holdings were accessible off the main reference room in a wing of the Library, climate controlled and with security monitors. The collection is contained in back-to-back mobile shelves in rows about forty-five feet long. Each double bookcase is about 28 inches wide, remotely controlled to move fore and aft in gaining aisle access to each side of the bookcases. These stacks are accessed through a narrow hall. About twelve rows of these mobile bookcases comprise the holdings. "You name it—it's there" would provide a brief summary of the contents. There are numerous Sandburg authored books, first and limited edition copies—especially rare early publications. There are many volumes of biographical Sandburg books, and a number of family scrapbooks are held. One by Paula Sandburg consists of about twenty-four volumes of clippings, letters, photos and articles. Numerous shelves contain books used exclusively by Sandburg in his writing. The Congressional Records of the Civil War are well worn, bookmarks peeking out of the top of each book, Sandburg notations for his writing of *The War Years*. We saw a life mask of Sandburg along with a box containing personal ephemera as his famous green eyeshade and his corncob pipe.

A final stop took us to the heart of where the collections are inventoried and compiled; the office of Christopher Jones and Bob Blissard. Here the "hands-on" curatorial work is researched, documented and interpreted. Conservation procedures start here, relative to their preservation, de-acidification and repair. The particular item is often outsourced to specialized conservation experts around the world.

Under the direction of Gene Rinkel, this project has been a major two-year program sponsored by a special grant entitled "Save America's Treasures" under the auspices of the National Park Service. The cost was \$2.5 million, matching funds were received from government grants and the private sector. Since acquiring the collection in the late 1950s, Gene recognized the problem of preservation for future generations and the need for an inventory that was accessible for research and education. He said the breakthrough came with the development of the computer age, allowing this vast collection to be identified and catalogued. It is a stellar accomplishment during his tenure as the chief curator of the collection.

\* From "A Visit to the Carl Sandburg Collection of Books and Manuscripts, University of Illinois Library at Urbana-Champaign, September 16, 1990," by Charles Bednar, Jr., University of Illinois Bachelor of Fine Arts, 1959, and Richard Bednar, University of Illinois Bachelor of Science, 1967, Master of Arts, 1973. Published in *Lombard Fifty Year Club Bulletin*, Winter, 1991.

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### **My Ten Reasons for Donating to the Sandburg Site**

Mary Eyre-Cerkez made a most generous contribution to the "Penny Parade." Her gift, added to the pennies collected during the recent event, will be used to make improvements to the Carl Sandburg Historic Site, as was true of the proceeds from past Parades.

Mrs. Eyre-Cerkez accompanied her gift with her top ten reasons for donating to the Sandburg Site. They are printed below for the enjoyment of the readers of *Inklings and Idlings* (and also to inspire them to be generous as well.)

#10 Don't we all wish to be remembered by someone after we're gone?

#9 I remember the fun of having a famous person (Carl Sandburg) visit my school when I was a first-grader.

#8 My husband and I enjoyed serving on the committee which designed the Sandburg Activity Book for area elementary students.

#7 In 2001, I was surprised when I was honored with first place in the Sandburg Memoir Writing Contest.

#6 While teaching first grade, I loved sharing with my young students Sandburg's song collections, poems and fun stories. The activities associated with the annual Penny Parade, all wonderfully worthwhile, provided a welcomed break in routine each January!

#5 As a now retired teacher, from Silas Willard School, I enjoyed the recent newspaper coverage of the school-wide penny collection. I am glad to see students continue to be exposed to this valuable part of history.

#4 Donations are needed and all projects/improvements are worthwhile.

#3 Donations are appreciated!

#2 To honor Steve Holden, Site Manager, whom I enjoyed working with on the student activity book project.

#1 In fond memory of Carol Nelson, past Site Manager, a lovely person whom I enjoyed knowing.

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## **The Galesburg Club**

The Galesburg Club stood at the corner of North Prairie Street and East Ferris Street for many years.

Local businessmen were invited to a meeting on March 9, 1885, to organize a club. Fifty men responded and Clark E. Carr presided at this introductory meeting. A committee was appointed to prepare plans for formally organizing. Members of the committee included T.J. Hale, Treasurer of Lombard University; J.K. Mitchell, Secretary-Treasurer of the gas company; A.A. Matteson, Vice President of the First National Bank, and L.W. Sanborn, an insurance agency owner.

At the second meeting on March 16, 1885, a constitution was adopted and officers and directors were elected. Mr. Hale became the president; Col. Carr, vice president; Mr. Mitchell secretary and G.P. Hoover, treasurer.

The directors were P.S. Post, a former Civil War general; E.F. Phelps, C.E. Lanstrum, a grocer on East Main Street; F.C. Rice, division superintendent of the C.B.&Q. Railroad and P.M. Johnson, manager of the O.T. Johnson Department Store;

The Galesburg Club was incorporated March 19, 1885. The first club rooms were located on South Prairie Street near Main Street. There was a billiard room with three tables, reading room, reception room and card room. It was a place where men could relax and enjoy the companionship of other businessmen. The membership increased to 250 in the next decade.

In later years a building was erected which included a number of amenities. It was used for many social events.

Not surprisingly, neither Carl nor August Sandburg were members of the Galesburg Club.

## **Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association**

**313 E. Third Street**

**Galesburg, IL 61401**

