

INKLINGS AND IDLINGS

The Newsletter of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association

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Fall 2013

FROM SITE SUPERINTENDENT MARTHA DOWNEY

The cicadas are chirping loudly this Sunday afternoon. Days are shorter and nights cooler. It has been a busy season here at the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site. Well over 900 visitors have toured the Site. Many are Sandburg fans; others just beginning to learn about the Prairie Poet. A few parents moving their students into Knox for the year have stopped by to check out what Galesburg offers.

The Knox County Master Gardeners have volunteered their time to lead the clean-up of the Site's flower beds. They are training us on the proper methods to keep the flowers and shrubs growing and blooming. I am very grateful for their help and enthusiasm for the Site. In October the monthly meeting of the Master Gardeners will be held here at the Site. If anyone is interested in helping with the Site's gardens, call me at 309-927-3345. They are working most Wednesdays 8 am to 10 am.

Beginning August 24 the Bishop Hill State Historic Site staff has been keeping the Sandburg Site open on weekends. The good news is that Kate Suits, a returning Knox student who worked at the Vachel Lindsay State Historic Site this summer, will be working at the Site. This will allow the Site to be open Thursdays and Fridays 2 pm to 5 pm and Saturdays and Sundays 9 am to 5 pm.

John Heasley has organized a wonderful line-up for the Fall Songbag Concert series. The first one in August featured local favorites Hammer and Pick. The remaining Songbag schedule is Sept 28—Dan Zahn and Kate Moretti, Oct. 26—Marc and Brandi Janssen, and Nov. 30—Greenmore.

As the days cool down, stop by the Site to check out the variety of books on the store shelves, watch the new orientation DVD done by Paul Bonesteel that debuted this past April, meet Kate, and enjoy the music at a Songbag concert.

CHAUTAUQUA IN BISHOP HILL

On September 7 the Bishop Hill Heritage Association revived a traditional American event--a Chautauqua. Performers Barry Cloyd and Betty Kay reenacted two prominent Galesburg citizens--Carl Sandburg and Mother Bickerdyke. Cloyd, as a young Sandburg, told the audience about his life and accompanied himself on guitar as he sang old songs Sandburg liked. Kay, dressed in attire she would have worn as a battlefield nurse, told of her life. It was a pleasant day with a light breeze in the tree-shaded Bishop Hill Park where Cloyd and Kay performed in the band stand.



Betty Kay as Mother Bickerdyke during the recent Chautauqua in the Bishop Hill Park



Barry Cloyd as Young Sandburg



Swedish Consul General Emerita Kerstin Lane from Chicago, enjoying the Bishop Hill Chautauqua

A lady from Colona told me during the Chautauqua that Lilian Steichen was aunt to her aunt's mother. The lady's aunt Grace Carlson Larson treasured her relationship to the Sandburg family. She collected Sandburg books and press clippings about him.

SANDBURG.ORG

Go to sandburg.org to get news of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association. Read Barbara Schock's interesting "Sandburg's Hometown" stories and view the upcoming Songbag Concert series schedule. Visit CSHSA on Facebook.

IDEAS FOR THE SITE DURING JUANITA BEDNAR'S PRESIDENCY OF THE ASSOCIATION

By Jerry Shea

By 1961 Adda George had relinquished her presidency of the Birthplace Association. Juanita Bednar took control and kept alive the spirit of her predecessor. A number of initiatives were started. First, the Penny Parade was introduced and still is in full vigor today. Another idea was to institute the *331 Memo*, a professional newsletter which would be printed each January 6th to coincide with Sandburg's birthday. Other ideas were entertained. Two were especially intriguing to the Galesburg group. It was felt that much more could be done to enlarge the Birthplace and enhance its importance as a monument and bring more visitors. One weekend alone Mrs. Bednar and Mattie Robertson with the help of others escorted 700 Boy Scouts through the little cottage. Juanita was convinced. She penned a letter to Sandburg who was now eighty-three. She wanted to make a case for the new ideas.

The hope of the long-range plan was to develop more land around the cottage. Since it was the center of interest for Sandburg treasures, it had a strong claim due to the restoration, and it had a central location as well as a Lincoln tie. The letter asked the aging poet to release enough Sandburg books and manuscripts to establish a Sandburg Museum-Library. At least three additional houses would be purchased to complete a one-half block area for new buildings as well as an area to be named the Carl Sandburg Park. Juanita was fifty-three and felt up to the task. She had already seen what Adda George had done at seventy. She had convinced many businesses to get on board, and the Chamber of Commerce had endorsed the idea.

On February 4, 1961, a letter arrived from Mr. Sandburg stating that such an enlargement would be "risky." He urged the committee to continue as it had. The lives of Sandburg's parents

had been "simple." Later that month Lilian Sandburg phoned Juanita personally to inform her that the "treasures" of her husband were to be donated to the University of Illinois. The rationale was that the U of I was centrally located, and the material would be available to a wider group. It was a disappointment.

A second idea surfaced. Perhaps the poet could celebrate his 85th birthday in Galesburg. Unfortunately, that idea lost out to a celebration at the Waldorf Astoria in New York City where over 500 attended, including Adda George and Juanita. However, ideas to improve the Birthplace were still alive.

In 1962 Sandburg was named Poet Laureate of Illinois by Governor Otto Kerner, and attendance was growing. As many as 3,000 visitors had made the trip to Galesburg by this time, and plans were still growing for an improvement to the site. A second plan was born and passed on to the Sandburgs in late 1964. Mrs. John Sutor of Wataga, an admirer of the writer and friend of Adda George, came to the Association with a new plan. She lived on a farm just outside of Galesburg. Not only did she admire the poet, she had actually read his works. She had read a news item in the local newspaper about a small park, and she knew instantly what would set it apart from other memorials.

A large granite boulder had been unearthed on a nearby farm when the State of Illinois excavated for building Interstate 74. The boulder would become the centerpiece for the park. The theme would be both simple and meaningful and balance on a line from Sandburg's novel *Remembrance Rock*. In the novel an old man comes to a large boulder surrounded by four pointed cedars which are symbolic of the four cardinal points from which the winds of Destiny and History blow. The old man has brought soil from Plymouth and Gettysburg. He reflects on his life and his contributions to the Family of Man. He is alone in the shadows.

Juanita was bowled over. It was perfect. In the mud and cold rain Juanita and Mrs. Sutor trudged to the farmer's field to see the huge stone which was only half exposed. The farmer promised to unearth the boulder with his tractor if they would come back the next day. In her enthusiasm Juanita hurried a letter off to the

Sandburgs in North Carolina. More than an acre had been set aside to develop the park. Donated materials and volunteer labor from hometown groups was requested and received. They would name the rock Remembrance Rock. Invitations would go out to the schools in the country bearing Sandburg's name. Each school would be invited to bring a bag of soil. A large dedication ceremony would be held, and everyone would "come and remember." Juanita was hopeful Mr. Sandburg would approve the plan. She was certain to point out that the boulder was much like the one used as a headstone of his parents.

Juanita felt great intensity for the project. Not since the original thrust had the Association put forth such an effort. A national letter writing campaign was initiated to increase support for the park idea.

By mid-1965 final arrangements for the Carl Sandburg Park were being made. Juanita was sure to keep communicating with the Sandburgs for all parts of the planning. Mr. Sandburg had stopped letter-writing by this point, and his wife had taken over all communications. Juanita wanted to be careful, because she felt that the Sandburgs may not want to be bothered with such plans due to their advanced ages. Then, too, many people were making demands on the Sandburgs. Most communication was by phone.

The final plans were put into place. Governor Kerner was invited to speak. The dedication was set for June 4, 1966. The weather could not have been better. A delicate yellow rose bloomed along the back fence on a rose bush Juanita had carried and planted from the farm on which she had grown up. Peonies in red were just opening. They had been warmed with hot water bags for days to assure their blooming.

It was an event. The State of Illinois sent its Historymobile for the weekend. It was parked in front of the Adda George house. The *Peoria Journal-Star* dispatched a helicopter which hovered over the area. Reporters from all papers including Chicago were roaming the crowd of 500 spectators seated in chairs and bleachers under the sycamores. A podium faced the crowd. The Sandburg Association cottage had evolved into one of the more notable literary shrines in the country. Those in attendance came from near and far to remember the poet. High school singers performed "Nancy Hanks" and the patriotic "This Is My

Country.”

The final element of the dedicatory service was the most moving, bringing more than one tear to many attentive eyes. Seventy-five packets of soil in plain brown envelopes were deposited around the base of Remembrance Rock by groups of children. Each marched around the rock as their schools' names were called over a public address system. Two hundred and fifty children participated. Soil from Gettysburg, Plymouth, and Valley Forge was added, including soil from Appuna, Sweden, Sandburg's homeland. In all 900 people toured the cottage and Historymobile. It was a meaningful event.

Juanita penned a letter to “Dear Ones” sent to both the Sandburgs and Adda George who was now ninety-two. It proved that an affection still burned in Knox County twenty years after the original dedication. It was because of this continued involvement and friendship that Carl Sandburg chose Galesburg as the burial site of his ashes. He died in July of 1967. Ten years later the ashes of his beloved wife Lilian joined his under Remembrance Rock.

SANDBURG AND ROOSEVELT

By Barbara Schock

Carl Sandburg spent much of the 1920's and 1930's writing his monumental biographies of Abraham Lincoln. After the terrible destruction and death toll of World War I he had withdrawn to a study of the previous century. While writing the biographies he continued to perform and speak on college campuses, write children's stories, review movies, and collect folk songs which were special interests of his.

Sandburg began to see parallels between Lincoln's time and the Great Depression and the beginning of World War II. He expressed these ideas in his writings. He also carried on a correspondence with President Franklin D. Roosevelt and other government officials.

In Sandburg's mind the memories of his family surviving the Panic of 1893 was very like the Depression of the 1930's. Even though he was successful financially, he knew there were many others who were without jobs, who had lost their homes, and barely had enough money to put food on the family table. His epic poem *The People, Yes* is an expression of those days.

Sandburg had voted for Roosevelt in the 1936 presidential election and considered him to be “a momentous historic character more thoroughly aware of what he is doing and where he is going than most of the commentators.”

Roosevelt liked telling the story about the time Sandburg came to visit him. Sandburg was writing his magisterial Lincoln biography *The War Years*. Sandburg asked FDR what window Lincoln had looked out to see the smoke of the Confederate cannons across the Potomac. Roosevelt did not know, but he invited Sandburg to tour the second floor and decide for himself.

The President used the oval room on the second floor as his private office. It was filled with ship models, books, a large desk, and comfortable sofas and chairs. According to Roosevelt, Sandburg stood at the windows of that room for about ten minutes. Finally, he said the middle window was the one Lincoln had looked through when he watched the battle. Roosevelt asked him how he knew that, and Sandburg responded that he could “feel it.” So many hours of associating with Lincoln's life had given Sandburg special insight.

He continued to correspond with the President. He also performed at the White House at Eleanor Roosevelt's invitation.

By the 1940 election Sandburg was in full support of Roosevelt's third run for the presidency. On the Sunday before election day a two-hour radio program was broadcast nationally. Sandburg spoke during the last five minutes of the program which ended at midnight. It was estimated eighty million people listened to the broadcast.

Sandburg again described the parallels between Lincoln and Roosevelt, the condition of the country eighty years before, and the fateful things that would happen in the world. He described Roosevelt as “a not perfect man and yet more precious than fine gold.” Quoting Owen Lovejoy about Abraham Lincoln, he said “if he is not the best conceivable President, he is the best possible.”

He received many requests for copies of the speech and also sent the President a copy a day after the election. The President told Sandburg, “I have not had a chance since the election to tell you really and truly how much that broadcast of yours...meant to me.”

MARY LOHMAN'S MEMORIES OF LIVING IN THE BIRTHPLACE NEIGHBORHOOD

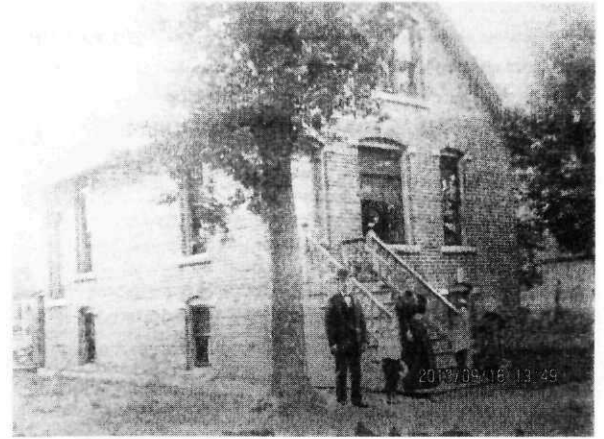
By Mike Hobbs

Mary Cullen Lowman is a retired Galesburg District 205 school teacher and an accomplished artist. When she was seven years old in 1939, she, her three siblings, and parents moved into her grandfather's house at 330 East Second Street in the same block and directly north of the Sandburg birthplace at 331 East Third. Her grandfather Dennis Quinn Cullen, an Irish immigrant, had been a railroad engineer for the CB&Q and was a contemporary of August Sandburg who worked in the Q's nearby blacksmith shop. On Saturday nights Mr. Cullen wrote nostalgic poems about Ireland.



Mary Cullen Lowman with some of her paintings behind her.

Mary recalls Mrs. Shenelli, the Sicilian widow of "Banana Joe" who Sandburg wrote about in *Always the Young Strangers*. Mrs. Shenelli lived in Sandburg's birthplace. The neighborhood kids were convinced she was a witch. They called her "Old Lady Shenelli." She walked with a crutch and wandered around the neighborhood shaking it menacingly at the kids. The fact that kids turned her outhouse over every Halloween may have contributed to her hostile attitude toward them.



The Cullen Home at 330 E. Second c 1900. Left to right, Dennis Quinn Cullen, John Cullen, Mrs. Cullen, and two children.

Mary recalls picking potato bugs and tomato worms off plants in the victory garden that was planted between her grandfather's house and Mrs. Shenelli's during World War II. She liked cats and, as a little girl, learned a short poem about a cat on silent haunches looking over a harbor and city, but she didn't know who the author was.

Mrs. Shenelli liked Mary's father John Cullen. He was kind to her. She was lonely and afraid. She spoke very little English. She stood at her back door looking for John, wanting him to talk to her. When he approached her, she would excitedly ask him, "Joe, dead?" Her son Joe was in Italy in the army during the war. John Cullen would gently touch her shoulder to reassure and calm her.

In high school Mary learned about Carl Sandburg and became a devoted fan. She won her first art award for a small water color of his birthplace. Mary wrote a story "loosely based on my grandfather's poetry writing and my father's dormant jealousy of Sandburg's fame." As Mary's grandfather enjoyed writing poetry, so did her father.

In 1950 Mary left Galesburg to attend St. Francis College in Joliet. Her freshman composition teacher, a nun, held a Phd, was head of the American Literature Department, and was a big fan of Carl Sandburg. Mary sensed an edge with her teacher when she was required to write a short story. She

"touched up" her story about her grandfather's poetry writing and her father's connection to Sandburg and turned it in. The nun took great interest in her story. When she commented to Mary about it, the opportunistic freshman told her, "I grew up on the same block Carl Sandburg was born on." The nun was hooked. "Proudly she pulled out a handwritten postcard sent to her from HIM [Sandburg]." Thinking Mary's father was a celebrity, she urged Mary to ask him about "anything he remembers [about Sandburg]. ANYTHING!" Mary got an "A" on her short story.

PRESIDENT OBAMA QUOTES SANDBURG DURING GALESBURG SPEECH

On July 24 President Barack Obama gave a speech at Knox College's Memorial Gymnasium. During his speech he referred to Carl Sandburg and quoted from his poem "Prairie" (*Cornhuskers*, 1918).

"One of America's greatest writers, Carl Sandburg, born right here in Galesburg over a century ago saw the railroads bring the world to the prairie, and then the prairie sent out its bounty to the world. And he saw the advent of new industries, new technologies, and he watched populations shift. He saw fortunes made and lost. And he saw how change could be painful--how a new age could unsettle long-held customs and ways of life. But he had that frontier optimism, and so he saw something more on the horizon. And he wrote, "I speak of new cities and new people. The past is a bucket of ashes. Yesterday is a wind gone down, a sun dropped in the west. There is only an ocean of tomorrows, a sky of tomorrows."

A BELGIAN VISITOR TO THE SITE

By Mike Hobbs

After spending several days in Belgium in late May I was anxious to meet a Belgian citizen who visited the Sandburg Site in June. Her name is Rita Boie. Her home is in Antwerp. She said that she came to the Site while visiting a friend in Galesburg because of her interest in literature and love of poetry. She admires Sandburg's work and wanted to see where he was born.

Like many Europeans Rita is multi-lingual. She speaks Flemish (Dutch), French, English, German, Spanish, and some Russian. She is studying Italian and hopes to learn Swedish. She said that knowing languages helps her to integrate more easily with people in countries she visits. "It is a real asset."



Belgian visitor Rita Boie in the visitors center museum with Mike Hobbs

SUITE AT HAWTHORN INN NAMED FOR SANDBURG

Hawthorne Inn, 2245 N. Seminary St., in Galesburg has a suite of rooms named for Sandburg.



WHAT DOES FUTURE HOLD?

The Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association and other interested parties are wrestling with ways to keep the Site open more in light of the State of Illinois' financial problems. This is not the first time that a Sandburg Association has pondered the future of the Site. In the February 12, 1969 edition of *331 Memo*, the Carl Sandburg Birthplace Association newsletter there appeared an editorial entitled "What Does Future Hold?" by Max Goodsill,

Chairman of the Birthplace Association's Long Range Planning Committee. Here is the text of the editorial:

"Shall 331 East Third St., where Carl Sandburg was born, where he lived as a child, and where his ashes are buried, become:

1. A National Historic Site?
2. A National Historic Landmark?
3. A Unit of the National Park Service and the Department of Interior?
4. An Illinois State Historic Site under the Department of Conservation?
5. A Park in the Illinois State Recreation Plan?
6. A City of Galesburg "Carl Sandburg Park"?

or shall it continue as Sandburg Birthplace, Inc., as chartered in 1945 operated exclusively by a local Board and supported by the pennies and respect of thousands of school children, and by a modest budget raised locally by volunteers of the Carl Sandburg Association?

"To study these questions, and to look into the opportunities and alternatives, a Long Range Planning Committee was started by the Association. The following board members volunteered for the committee: Fred Steller, Mrs. C.F. Bengston, Mrs. J.F. Harvey, Edward L. Kennedy, Richard R. Larson, Barbara P. Vaughan, Robert Harrison, and Jack Larson. Later, these additional members were drafted: Thomas B. Herring, William J. Foley, William H. Moon, Merle Banks, Mr. and Mrs. Frank Ward, Reef Waldrep and Leroy H. Dyer. Max Goodsill is the present chairman.

"After meetings and consultations with officials of the National Park Service, the Illinois State Department of Conservation, the Illinois State Historical Society and the City of Galesburg, three different sets of plans were drawn and revised, with assistance from the city and from Architect Myron Soupene, who was employed by the city especially to work with the Sandburg Association and to expedite the incorporation of their ideas into preliminary sketches.

"On Dec. 12, at a special board meeting, the Association went on record as commending Plan 4 as a preliminary one, and this was sent to Mayor Robert Cabeen and the City Council. This plan suggests a "Carl Sandburg Park: as a city project in areas about 331 East Third St. As a city project, such a park will qualify both in state and national programs for preserving historic sites and improving recreational areas in the public interest. City Manager Herring brought the plans before the City Council Dec. 23 and 30. They are receiving attention from the City Planning Commission and the Knox County Zoning Administrator.

"Illinois newspapers have been expressing concern about North Carolina's financial progress toward a Sandburg memorial for Flat Rock, N.C., where the poet lived the last 20 years of his life. The National Park Service, of the Department of Interior, has been successful in getting a Congressional subcommittee to recommend a federal appropriation of \$225,000 to buy the Sandburg farm near Flat Rock (242 acres), and also \$952,000 to develop it for tourism. No objections have been raised in Galesburg, where the purpose has been to preserve a humble home and neighborhood without fanfare or commercialism.

"Because of increasing numbers of visitors to the Sandburg birthplace since the poet's death July 22, 1967, the local committee decided that enlisting City of Galesburg and State of Illinois support for a CARL SANDBURG PARK in or near the 331 East Third area was a proper and logical step as a long-range policy."

GIFTS FOR THE BIRTHPLACE IN 1968

Listed in the February 12, 1969 331 *Memo* were gifts given to the Birthplace that year. They include:

From the Sandburg Family--a number of first edition Sandburg books (autographed), a number of personal letters, three canes from his personal collection, his eye shade, a pocket knife, handmade razor made by his blacksmith father, eye glasses worn at Harbert, Michigan by the author, a handmade lace tablecloth made by Carl's mother, and a rare picture of Abraham Lincoln (stereoptican).

From Mrs. Alfred Harcourt in memory of Adda George--rare collection of original letters written by Sandburg to Mr. & Mrs. Alfred Harcourt, who were publishers of Sandburg's books and a number of first edition Sandburg books, many of them autographed.

From Charles Bednar, Jr.--an original copy of the *Chicago Tribune* published at the time of the assassination of President Lincoln.

From Mr. & Mrs. Arthur Wachs--kitchen table used by Sandburg's parents and also used by Sandburg in doing some of his early writing, his mother's sewing machine, and an antique clock.

From Mr. & Mrs. Martin Sutor--Purington pavers for walk to Remembrance Rock.

Photos taken at memorial for Sandburg October 1, 1968--twenty-five photos by *Register-Mail* photographer Dale Humphrey, a set of colored photos by William J. Foley, and a set of colored photos by Ray M. Brown.

From the *Galesburg Post*--program from Sandburg's 75th birthday party at Blackstone Hotel, Chicago, January 6, 1953

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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