

INKLINGS AND IDLINGS

The Newsletter of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association

313 East Third Street • P.O. Box 585 • Galesburg, Illinois 61402 • (309) 342-2361 • www.sandburg.org

Summer 2013

CSHSA ANNUAL MEETING JULY 9

In accordance with Article III, Section 2 of the By-Laws of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association, the Annual Meeting of the organization will be held at 7 pm, Tuesday, July 9, 2013, at the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site, 313 East Third Street, Galesburg, Illinois.

At that time members of the Board of Directors of the Association will be elected for the coming year, and business as may properly come before the Association shall be transacted.

Following the meeting Jerry Shea will present a talk about Sandburg's connections to Galesburg and the Birthplace. The talk will be open to the public.

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

FROM SITE SUPERINTENDENT MARTHA DOWNEY

Mother Nature may have been making the local headlines this spring with rain, rain, and more rain, but the Site also has news, and it does not involve flooded basements.

The Site reopened for the summer season on May 17 just in time to welcome a bus of Chicago high school students. Kelsey Meredith is working at the Site this summer. Stop by, introduce yourself, and get to know this talented Galesburg native.

The big news at the Site is a wonderful new orientation DVD replacing one that was decades old. The Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association, using money from the Norm Winick Memorial,

commissioned Paul Bonesteel to produce this DVD utilizing the extensive work he did for *The Day Carl Sandburg Died*. This presentation is an informative and entertaining sixteen minutes. It will appeal to those who know little of Sandburg's life and to those who have studied it.

It was during Sandburg Days that this DVD was viewed for the first time. The first to see it was a group of people who staff Illinois' Tourist Information Centers. They were travelling Illinois to become familiar with the attractions to which they direct people. They toured the Sandburg Site and Galesburg on April 20.

This contribution to the Site's interpretive efforts by the Association is truly appreciated. On a number of occasions Norm Winick had suggested to me the possibility that Paul Bonesteel might do an orientation DVD for the Site. It is fitting that part of his Memorial went to this, and I believe he would be very, very pleased. Response has been unanimously positive.

In the June 10, 2013, issue of *Time* magazine, Carl Sandburg is quoted in an article about Chicago's Mayor Rahm Emanuel. It was a line from the first stanza of "Chicago." Opening lines from that exhilarating poem are often quoted, but other lines are every bit as affirming for Illinois' largest city.

"Come and show me another city with lifted head
singing so proud to be alive and coarse and strong
and cunning.

Flinging magnetic curses amid the toil of piling job
on job, here is a tall bold slugger set vivid against
the little soft cities;

Fierce as a dog with tongue lapping for action,
cunning as a savage pitted against the wilderness,

Bareheaded,
Shoveling,
Wrecking,
Planning,
Building, breaking, rebuilding,
Under the smoke, dust all over his mouth, laughing
with white teeth,
Under the terrible burden of destiny laughing as a
young man laughs,
Laughing even as an ignorant fighter laughs who
has never lost a battle,
Bragging and laughing that under his wrist is the
pulse, and under his ribs the heart of the people,
Laughing!"

FROM CSHSA PRESIDENT CHUCK BEDNAR

As a new fiscal year of our Association begins on July 1, thank you to all who have supported our activities. The response from our members, local community, City and State officials, and board of directors has significantly sustained the Birthplace.

We have focused on supporting the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency in its Site management. We created nine "standing committees" that promote our Association's activities. For the past three years we have had a Board Retreat in the fall. A significant effort was made by Treasurer Rick Sayre to "get our house in order" by renewing our federal and State not-for-profit status. The Governance Committee, chaired by Gary Wagle, evaluated and revised our By-Laws. The revisions were approved by the membership in January. The acquisition of a new flat-screen HD television for the Visitors Center with funds from the Norm Winick Memorial was coordinated by board member Bert McElroy.

Last fall we received the good news that the Galesburg Community Foundation had granted us funds sufficient to paint the outside of the Visitors

Center. That work will begin this summer. With coordination from board member Tom Foley, Paul Bonesteel, creator of *The Day Carl Sandburg Died*, made a very nice sixteen-minute video that is played for visitors to the Site. Remaining funds from the Norm Winick Memorial were used to finance this video.

2013 began with a successful Penny Parade chaired by board members Stanford Shover and Mike Hobbs. Over \$3,000 was raised. We recognized participating schools with videos, Sandburg books, and framed Sandburg portraits. Board member Pat Kane contributed to the purchase of the portraits and frames.

Education Committee Chairman Barry Swanson is developing a core school curriculum for Galesburg District 205 based on Sandburg literature. Our brochure "Carl Sandburg: A Driving Tour of Historic Sites in Galesburg" was reprinted in financial partnership with the Galesburg Area Convention & Visitors Bureau. A display of Sandburg memorabilia is featured at the GACVB on East Main Street.

We participated in the first annual museum fair at the Sandburg Mall in April. It was sponsored by the West Central Illinois Museum Alliance. Our quarterly newsletter *Inklings and Idlings* continues to provide information about Sandburg and CSHSA activities to our members and friends. Membership Chairman Gayle Stewart was pleased to report a successful membership drive earlier this year.

Carley Robison, Archivist, Knox College Seymour Library, gave us a unique gift of copies of a pamphlet published in 1925 entitled "Carl Sandburg, the Man and His Poetry" by Harry Hanson. We then gave copies of this interesting early publication to the Carl Sandburg College and Galesburg High School libraries and to the Galesburg Public Library.

We were happy to see the seasonal opening of the Site on May 17. Site Interpreter this season is Kelsey Meredith. We continue to enjoy the availability of the Site through the Illinois Historic Preservation Agency and Site Superintendent Martha Downey. We thank the IHPA and Martha for their splendid cooperation and support.

A number of our board members serve on the Galesburg Public Art Commission. They are

sponsoring an exciting Sandburg project by commissioning sculptor Lonnie E. Stewart to create a 9' standing bronze figure of Mr. Sandburg. When completed it will be located in downtown Galesburg's Central Park. The statue will be accompanied by a Nubian Goat. The goat was chosen as a symbolic figure representing the Sandburg family's love for raising animals on their farm in Connemara, NC. The statue will stand 15' tall on its pedestal and will be surrounded by sixteen granite panels around the base. Each panel will be inscribed with Sandburg quotations. Funded by private donations the memorial is destined to become a city landmark for future generations to enjoy. A National Day of Dedication is planned for the spring of 2014. More information can be found on the GPAC website www.gpac.co.

As I take leave as President, thank you for the opportunity to serve in a leadership role for the Association. Indeed, for me personally, it was a special time to follow in the footsteps of my mother Juanita Kelly Bednar, President of the Carl Sandburg Birthplace Association from 1959 to 1967.

Through the vision, commitment, and efforts of our board of directors, we will work hand in hand with the IHPA to help preserve and promote the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site for future generations to enjoy. The best is yet to come!

WEBSITE, FACEBOOK

Visit our CSHSA website at sandburg.org.
Visit us on Facebook.

CARL SANDBURG, MOVIE CRITIC

By Jerry Shea

As Lilian Sandburg once said, "Carl Sandburg and Chicago were made for each other." This just after the writer and his wife relocated to Chicago from Milwaukee. From that time forward Sandburg and journalism were inseparable. Many of Sandburg's poems grew out of his experiences as a newsman. However, many do not connect Sandburg and the *Daily News* with Sandburg's job as film and entertainment critic in one of the best papers in

town. He began that portion of his career in 1920. The recent death of Roger Ebert, longtime film critic and Pulitzer Prize winner, shows interesting parallels between the two and the focus of each man's criticism.

Sandburg was a critic for seven years for the *Daily News*. He was a member of a remarkable newspaper staff. In 1920 he asked for and received the critic's job; he thought he could use the extra time to devote to his other writings. During those years he would spend one to two days viewing films or other entertainment and produce four articles for paper publication, then have other time to write, travel, and find interviews for his columns. During those years he worked on *Smoke and Steel*, two children's books, *The American Songbag*, and the first installment of *Abraham Lincoln: The Prairie Years* in the dark and quiet of the theatres.

Chicago was a leader and for a time the center of the motion picture film industry and had more movie theatres than any other city in America. Some theatres held up to 3,000 moviegoers. He worked primarily during the silent era but watched as sound was slowly introduced to the medium. Many believe the Chicago World's Fair of 1894 debuted the first sound to movies. In 1897 Chicago may have had the first commercial movie theatre. In 1907 the first real attempt to put sound to the film industry occurred in the form of Kinetoscope. Chicago was also the home of the first motion picture trade magazine, *Nickelodeon*. During this period at least three other companies were at work filming commercially for entertainment and training. But shortly thereafter the industry favored California for obvious reasons including weather.

The *Daily News* was a leader in reviewing to broaden its reader base and increase advertisement revenue. Chicago was perfect for such because trains had to travel through to criss-cross the country bringing actors, celebrities, musicians and more. Perfect for hard working reporters to get news and interviews.

Sandburg treated reviewing seriously. He wrote about film, vaudeville, drama, concerts and recitals. The *Daily News* was not adverse to allowing its reporters to travel for leads and interviews. This eventually allowed Sandburg to visit New York and Hollywood where he met and interviewed many actors including Charlie Chaplin.

His reviews considered quality of the film,

authenticity of sets, actors' speech, and attire. Most importantly, he was always concerned about the common folk; the social reality of film mattered to him. He looked for a film's connection to life. One can imagine him watching the faces of audience members as they spent their pennies and dimes. He wanted a film to do the work, not just be excessive. He was known to say, "If a base hit will do why hit a home run?" Sandburg was a rough man. He had been a hobo and spent time in hobo camps next to railroad tracks, slept and traveled in boxcars, been arrested and spent a few days in jail. He believed classic films and stories are made from the heart and not by formulas. His "lingo" or common style of speech could be read by anyone and understood. That had been a key to his success.

Sandburg also spoke up about excessive violence on screen. Why keep punching and throwing someone and killing off character after character?

During his reviewer days he wrote on such classics as *Treasure Island*, *Rin-Tin-Tin*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The Mark of Zorro*, *The Kid*, *Huck Finn*, and many more. He spoke of Chaplin, Garbo, Douglas Fairbanks Jr., and others.

He believed film to be so powerful that one day it might replace books in schools. He saw the future in education especially newsreels and shorts. He, like others, did not believe in sound and film as a medium, but by 1925 he was impressed with some theatres experimenting with Vitaphone demonstrations to put orchestral accompaniments to films.

Sandburg's career as a reviewer ended with one of the first talkies, *The Jazz Singer*. Eventually he left the *Daily News* in 1932 to devote full time to his Lincoln book and other projects.

For more information and interesting reading look for *Lost Chicago*, a collection of photos of Chicago theatres and other buildings, and *Carl Sandburg at the Movies: A Poet in the Silent Era* to read actual reviews from those Sandburg years.

CARL SANDBURG, TB REFORMER

By Barbara Schock

Between 1908 and 1912 Carl Sandburg lived in Wisconsin. His first job was as an organizer for

the Social Democratic Party. A few months later he worked for a department store creating its newspaper advertisements. Then he began writing for the *Milwaukee Journal*, an independent newspaper published in the state's largest city.

Sandburg's socialist leanings fitted with the job of investigative reporter. He liked to write about people, and he sympathized with the problems of the working class. As a reporter he had time to study current issues and gather information to support his views. As a socialist he wanted to find ways to solve social problems.

One of those problems was tuberculosis. The disease was killing 200,000 people a year in the United States. The bacteria is spread through the air. An individual with an active case can spread it by coughing or sneezing. Only ten percent of those infected with tuberculosis become active cases. If they are not treated, half of them will die. Others with inactive cases do no harm.

People in certain occupations seemed to be more susceptible to the disease. Sandburg found that seamstresses, cigar makers, boilermakers, bartenders, and cabinetmakers were more prone to becoming sick with the disease. The cramped living conditions of many immigrant families as well as poor diets increased the incidence of TB.

In those days there were no antibiotics to treat lung disease. Fresh air, good food, and plenty of rest were considered the best cures. Patients were often confined to special treatment facilities.

Late in September, 1909, Sandburg began working for the Wisconsin Anti-Tuberculosis Association. By Christmas time he had visited forty-five cities in the state. He traveled with several hundred illustrations, including posters, photographs, and lantern slides. To communicate with immigrants who spoke little English he asked that interpreters accompany his presentations.

Sandburg also sold Christmas Seals which were used to finance treatment programs. Denmark had created the idea of Christmas Seals in 1904. By 1908 Christmas Seals were being sold at post offices in the United States. The Seals cost a penny each and were applied to letters and packages.

Sandburg and many other people were

stranded in the railroad station in West Bend, Wisconsin just before the New Year. He decided to give his lecture about tuberculosis to those waiting for the train. There were a number of traveling salesmen in the audience. After the presentation they bought Christmas Seals and told their associates about them. Many a letter or package was decorated with the little stamps sending out the word about the crusade against tuberculosis.

There are still millions of cases of tuberculosis in the world today. Most of them are in developing nations. There are drugs which treat the disease, but they must be used properly. Some strains have become drug-resistant because of improper use of antibiotics.

After the anti-tuberculosis tour Sandburg went home to Milwaukee to be with his wife, Paula. The Social Democrats were campaigning to win more seats on the City Council as well as the position of mayor. The Sandburgs joined in and helped Emil Seidel become the Mayor of Milwaukee. By April, 1910, Seidel had appointed Carl Sandburg as his private secretary.

THE FAMILY OF MAN

By Mike Hobbs

Edward Steichen, Carl Sandburg's brother-in-law, created *The Family of Man*, a photographic exhibit first shown at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City in 1955. The exhibit contained 503 photos from sixty-eight countries taken by 273 photographers from around the world. The exhibit was turned into a book with the prologue written by Sandburg. *The Family of Man* photos are "striking snapshots of the human experience, which lingers on birth, love, and joy, but also touch war, privation, illness, and death. [They] focus on the commonalities that bind people and cultures around the world" [Wikipedia]

My friend Bev Kjellander and I recently returned from a trip to Belgium, France, and Ireland. Our treatment as tourists by those people we encountered there puts me in mind of the theme of *The Family of Man*—our commonality. Throughout our trip people were nice, hospitable, and tried to assist us. There was a language barrier in Belgium and France. Neither Bev nor I speak French, and most of the people we encountered spoke little or no

English. Bev kidded me that when I tried to communicate with people there I spoke louder and slower as if that would help. Maybe I did. I wasn't aware of it. But somehow, sometimes with sign language, we got through to each other.

We stayed at a B&B in Belgium near where my dad was housed by civilians during World War II. Georges Gretry and Jeannine Marx who run the B&B in Ensival and their daughter Anna spoke very little English, but we accomplished a lot despite language difficulties. They showed me the house where my dad stayed and somehow managed to locate a son of that host family. His English was good. It was wonderful speaking with him. He told me that his parents were members of the Belgian Resistance during the war.



Georges Gretry, Jeannine Marx, Anna Ensival, Belgium



Jean Noel Sevrin, Mike Hobbs Ensival, Belgium

Despite language difficulties our B&B hosts took us to a Memorial Day ceremony at a nearby American Cemetery where nearly 8,000 American

soldiers are buried. The American Ambassador spoke. Belgian officials spoke. Wreaths were presented. At each marker in the Cemetery was an American flag and a Belgian flag. After the ceremony I spoke with some Belgians. Despite language difficulties, mainly on my part, I understood their genuine appreciation for American soldiers liberating their country from the Nazis during the war.

Our hosts then took us to a local museum which houses World War II artifacts. The curator, who also spoke very little English, opened the museum for us. Amazingly, he had a copy of my dad's battalion history which showed his name. Then a young man joined us who is restoring a Sherman tank. His English was good. Someone brought in some good Belgian beer, and we all sat around for awhile communicating the best we could and enjoying each other's company.

We Americans sometimes hear about the French being arrogant with American tourists, but we experienced none of that in Metz, Paris, and Normandy. On the contrary, the French that we encountered, like the Belgians, went out of their way to be friendly and accommodating.

It was good to finish our trip in Ireland where we had no trouble communicating. And, yes, the Irish were as friendly as you may have expected.

There is a commonality in human nature in people trying to help others, even complete strangers, who are having difficulties. Bev and I experienced that trait on our trip.

ADDA GEORGE'S NEIGHBOR

By Mike Hobbs

A while back I attended a funeral in Galesburg. At the luncheon following the burial I saw Mike Rice with whom I had worked at the railroad. He lives in Missouri now. I'd guess he is around seventy years old. During our visit I told him that I'm on the CSHSA board.

Mike surprised me when he said that when he was a teenager in the late 1950's he lived across the street from Adda George in the 200 block of North Academy Street. She lived in a well-kept, brown, framed house. He described her as a small, white-haired lady in her 80's, very neat, orderly, and nice. He said she was educated. She encouraged everyone to read Sandburg's writings.

6 INKLINGS AND IDLINGS / Summer 2013

Mike did yard work for her. She had some strict rules in that regard. No power mower. He had to use a push mower. No electric clippers. He had to use hand clippers.

ALASKA'S FIDDLING POET

"Alaska's Fiddling Poet" Ken Waldman appeared at the Sandburg Days *festival for the mind* in April. He wrote this poem for the occasion.

Carl Sandburg and His Days

"Renaissance man before renaissance man was a term in vogue. He played music and wrote poems, of course. His favorite trick was no trick at all. He was of this land, of prairie and farm. A curious man, that meant he took life by steps. He'd stick himself in North Carolina. His plan was no plan at all. He did what was needed. His poems entertained. His poems could feed. His poems turned to prose. He wrote of Lincoln, of America, of song. A sly grin. Poet of the people. Of Illinois. Sandburg, he was a smart Galesburg boy."

"CHRIST AND CARL SANDBURG", A REVIEW

By Chuck Bednar

An interesting essay about Carl Sandburg's religious perspective by Henry E. Kolbe appeared in the spring, 1959 issue of *Religion and Life*. Entitled "Christ and Carl Sandburg", the author delved into the inner soul of this literary great by interpreting the meaning of his poetry as related to his beliefs and convictions about God and Jesus Christ.

Early on as a young boy growing up in Galesburg Sandburg vividly described his first encounter with the gospel through his family which faithfully attended the First Swedish Lutheran Church and read scriptures from the Swedish family Bible. Events affected the religious affiliation of the family because of some pastoral leadership problems which altered the congregation when the "Elim" Swedish Church was organized. It established its own meeting site in a hall located on South Broad Street near the Public Square. Later this church began construction of a new building at the southeast corner of Waters and Kellogg Streets. This is the present site of Trinity Lutheran Church. During Sandburg's time the pastor was Rev. Carl A. Nyblad. Sandburg was confirmed there at the age of

thirteen. After Rev. Nyblad's departure the Sandburg's didn't go back to the Elim Swedish Church but attended here and there, mostly at the Swedish Methodist Church.

Kolbe's essay focuses on several of Sandburg's published works, including *Chicago*, *Selected Poems*, *Slabs of the Sunburnt West*, and *Good Morning, America*. In his hundreds of poems, short and long, early and late, there are the voices and echoes of his time, the words that portray not merely the sounds but also the sights and even the smells and the indefinable feelings of the age in which he lived.

What is perhaps not so familiar is that a strong current of explicitly religious feeling and expression runs throughout his poems from the earliest ones in the 1916 volume to the previously unpublished ones included in the final section of *Complete Poems* of 1950. There are direct references or indubitable allusions to religious themes on more than 200 of the 676 pages of *Complete Poems*. Many of these references or allusions are used almost casually to illustrate a particular point. Far more often, however, the explicitly religious passages in the poems are at once profoundly moving and spiritually penetrating.

In his first autobiography *Always the Young Strangers* he writes that one of his most vivid memories of his early life was that of hearing his father read from a small Swedish Bible on Sunday afternoons,

"Certain words I had heard my father read stayed with me, *Gud* meaning "God", or *evangelium* meaning "gospel". I asked my mother to point out those words for me so my eyes would know how spoken words look when fastened down in black on white paper. She put her finger on those words and I had a dim beginning of learning to read, a hazy understanding."

This incident, which apparently took place when Sandburg was about four years old, indicates how deep-rooted was his sense of religion and God. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that there is a fundamentally religious tone to many of his poems—a deep sense of God, a particularly warm and sensitive awareness of Jesus Christ, a hatred of injustice which has strong overtones of the Hebrew prophets, a probing after answers to the long-standing questions of man's destiny, and the meaning of human history.

In the section of the essay entitled "Sandburg's Pictures of Jesus" the author states

7 INKLINGS AND IDLINGS / Summer 2013

that the warmth and naturalness of Sandburg's thoughts of Jesus is revealed in a brief poem "Epistle" which reflects clearly the thought of Christ in the Synoptic Gospels,

"Jesus loved the sunsets on Galilee.
Jesus loved the fishing boats forming silhouettes
against the sunsets on Galilee.
Jesus loved the fishermen on the fishing boats
forming silhouettes against the sunsets on Galilee.
When Jesus said: Good-by, I will come again:
Jesus meant that good-by for the sunsets,
the fishing boats, the fishermen, the silhouettes
all and any against the sunsets on Galilee:
the good-by and the promise meant all or nothing."

In another category entitled "Poems of Wrath and Indignation" Kolbe quotes a Sandburg poem as not simply a powerful denunciation. It is at the same time a powerful affirmation of what Sandburg himself thinks of Christ, as the vivid contrasts between the evangelist [Billy Sunday] and Jesus make abundantly clear,

"Jesus had a way of talking soft and outside of a few bankers and higher-ups among the con men of Jerusalem everybody liked to have this Jesus around because he never made any fake passes and everything he said went and he helped the sick and gave the people hope.

"I've been to this suburb of Jerusalem they call Golgotha, where they nailed Him, and I know if the story is straight it was real blood ran from His hands and the nail-holes, and it was real blood spurted in red drops where the spear of the Roman soldier rammed in between the ribs of this Jesus of Nazareth."

Sandburg's wonder of Christ is evident in an early writing entitled "Rusty Crimson" [Christmas Day, 1917]. In it he saw Christ's birth as not long ago in the stable at Bethlehem but in his own time in his prairie state of Illinois,

"The five-o'clock prairie sunset is a strong man going to sleep after a long day in a cornfield. The red dust of a rusty crimson is fixed with two fingers of lavender. A hook of smoke, a woman's nose in charcoal and . . . nothing. The timberline turns in a cover of purple. A grain elevator humps a shoulder. One steel star whisks out of a pointed fire. Moonlight comes on the

stubble.
Jesus in an Illinois barn early this morning,
the baby Jesus . . . in flannels”

SANDBURG'S SOCIALIST POLITICS

Dr. Alan Jenkins wrote a manuscript entitled “Carl Sandburg's Mentor and First Publisher” that was printed in the *Illinois Historical Society Journal* in 1952. Sandburg wrote Dr. Jenkins a letter from Flat Rock in 1951 in which he commented on the manuscript,

“Dear Alan:

The only suggestion I would have is the use of the word Socialist without definiton. I have been a dozen varieties of Socialist in my time. Most of the time I have been what might be termed a Bernstein

Revisionist—or Social Democrat—or a manner of Fabian. At the time I knew [Philip Green] Wright we were as much Anarchist or Syndicalist in our leanings as we were Socialist. This was the time of some writer reasoning, “Jesus was an Anarchist. All good men are Anarchists. I am an Anarchist.” . . . Have been overworking and after tending to some affairs in New York next week I will have to return home instead of heading to Chicago and Galesburg as I had hoped. I'd like to think of your getting here again this summer. Anyhow I hope we'll be meeting this fall.

Yrs

Carl”

[*The Letters of Carl Sandburg*. Edited by Herbert Mitgang]

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Galesburg, Illinois 61402-0585

P.O. Box 585

Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association