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# INKLINGS AND IDLINGS

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The Newsletter of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association

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FALL 2022

## FROM SITE SVCS. SPEC. BRYAN ENGELBRECHT

Excerpt from "Three Pieces On The Smoke of Autumn"

*Smoke of autumn is on it all.  
The streamers loosen and travel.  
The red west is stopped with a gray haze.  
They fill the ash trees, they wrap the oaks,  
They make a long-tailed rider  
In the pocket of the first, the earliest evening star.*

Carl Sandburg  
*Cornhuskers*, 1918

Although City of Galesburg ordinances prohibit the burning of leaves and the Emerald Ash Borer sadly has killed almost all the area's ash trees, signs of fall are beginning to show at Carl Sandburg State Historic Site. Flowers in the garden areas tended by our wonderful volunteers Gail, Jamie, and Sylviane are beginning to wilt and be removed as the growing season winds down. Tommy will soon be concentrating on mulching the leaves in between guests rather than keeping up with the grass. Visitors will stop by during such events as the Knox College Homecoming and Knox County Scenic Drive as the leaves drop. Rather than reading Sandburg outside in the shade, we will all soon be shifting to perusing his works inside under a blanket or by the fire.

The autumn period will feature our final Songbag Concerts of the 2022 season. Dance Hall Doves, a Galesburg based duo, featuring CSHSA Board Member Erin Glasnovich and Corie "Cow" Weisenberger will perform on October 9. Featuring a mix of bluegrass, folk, rock, oldies, and original tunes, their concert will provide a little something for everyone to enjoy. Multi-instrumentalist Charlie Hayes will conclude the series on November 13. His set will include classic songs on acoustic guitar and piano. Many thanks go out to our Songbag Committee of Erin Glasnovich, Mike Panther, and Nick Regiacorte for putting together a full season of concerts after the pandemic disrupted the 2020 and 2021 seasons. Special thanks go out to Judy Greek for coordinating and providing the refreshments for the performances.

As we all know, fall can quickly turn into winter. As such, it is not too early to begin thinking about gifts during the holiday season. CSHSA Treasurer Rick Sayre has been hard at work finding out-of-print books and other specialty items for the Visitor's Center giftshop. Items

offered for sale include the novel *Still Points* by former CSHSA President Barry Swanson. Copies of CSHSA member Lawrence Webb's book *Carl Sandburg: Poet, Politician, and Prophet* are available also. Be sure to check out these titles and more as you attend a Songbag Concert or complete a fall visit to Carl Sandburg State Historic Site.

## VIEW SANDBURG HOLDINGS AT WIU ARCHIVES

Western Illinois University Malpass Library Archivist Kathy Nichols has invited CSHSA members to view the extensive collection of Sandburg holdings in their Archives and Special Collections on Tuesday, October 18 at 1 pm. Noted local historian Dr. John Hallwas, who has written and spoken widely about Sandburg, will present the talk "Carl Sandburg's Poetry and the Issue of Community." An article written by Dr. Hallwas appears elsewhere in this newsletter. If you would like to make the trip to Macomb, email Mike Hobbs at mhobbs@grics.net or call him at 309-343-9079 by October 10. We will carpool. If you can drive, let Mike know.

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[Ed. Note: Two East Coast CSHSA members—Dr. Lawrence Webb of South Carolina and Dr. John W. Quinley of North Carolina—have recently written books about Carl Sandburg. Following are their descriptions of their books.]

## AUTHOR'S PREVIEW OF *CARL SANDBURG, POET, POLITICIAN, AND PROPHET*

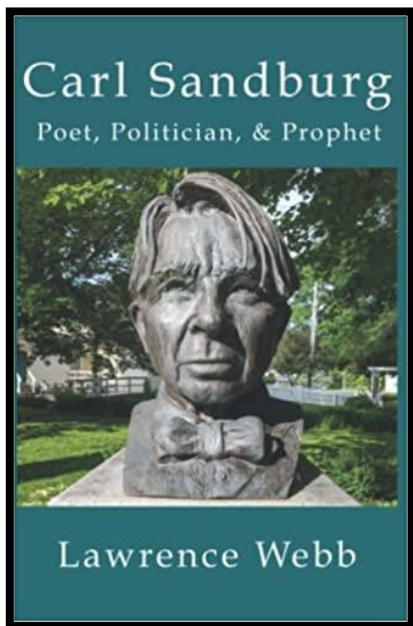
By Dr. Lawrence Webb

*Paperback, \$29.99; Kindle, \$4.99. Available from: Amazon.com and the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Assn Museum Store, 313 E. Third St., Galesburg, Illinois 61402 Phone: 309-342-2361.*

I've been asked why I wrote this book.

Good question. I knew almost nothing about Sandburg until a fellow professor at Anderson University invited me to develop a non-credit Sandburg short course for senior adults.

Early in my reading, I recognized his social and ethical concerns for down-to-earth and down-and-out people. As a Baptist minister, I wanted to point readers to those emphases.



## FOG POEMS

The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg has five with “fog” in their titles:

“Pearl Fog” instructs the reader to roll up the collar, go out into the night, and confess sins::

*Yes, tell your sins  
And know how careless a pearl fog is  
Of the laws you have broke.*

“Fog Portrait” pictures “Funnels of an ocean liner negotiating a fog night; pouring a taffy mass down the wind; layers of soot on the top deck. . . .In the storm’ vortex,“ we are told three times of “a woman’s steel face ... looking ... looking.”

“Baltic Fog Notes” presents more stormy weather — this time a week in Norway in 1918. where he had been sent by the Newspaper Enterprise Association to cover the Great War (World War I). In the extended storm at sea, fearful for his life, Sandburg pictures three places he might be buried: a Norwegian mountain graveyard, in the North Atlantic, or an Illinois cornfield.

“Fog Numbers” seems to suggest every person and everything has its number, perhaps its number of days. If the midnight fog and the morning sun will tell him their numbers, he will return the favor.

“Fog” This 22-word metaphor is one of Sandburg’s shortest and — as his poems rapidly disappear from high school and university anthologies — one of his best known. It likens the fog to a cat that comes in quietly on its padded paws, then rests on its haunches and surveys the area before moving on.

Some interpreters see mystery, even danger, in this stealthful entrance. This may call to mind TV or movie mysteries or suspenseful detective thrillers with sleuths playing virtual hide and seek..

*The fog comes  
on little cat feet.  
It sits looking  
over harbor and city  
on silent haunches  
and then moves on.*

Throughout his eighty-nine-plus years — especially as a Chicago newspaper reporter — his writing often reflects closeup encounters with people on the ragged edge. My father was a farm hand, and we often were on welfare with clothing and food from government sources. So, I readily identify with the down-to-earth and down-and-out:

Children in factories (“Mill-Doors”), racism (*The Chicago Race Riots*: July 1919), immigrant workers (“Child of the Romans”), young women allured by the city who succumb to selling themselves on the street (“Working Girls”).

Sandburg often wrote poems about war. He had mixed feelings, sometimes hawkish, but more generally as a dove. *Chicago Poems* has eleven poems in a section titled “War,” all looking at the horrors of warfare.

Exhibit A for the down-to-earth, “Jack”: “Jack was a swarthy swaggering son of a gun. He worked thirty years on the railroad ten hours a day. . . . He married a tough woman and they had eight children . . . .”

For the down-and-out, consider “Mag.” The speaker, Mag’s frustrated husband, tries to come to grips with his inability to pay for rent and groceries. He wishes he could escape his responsibilities as a husband and father.

First line: “I wish to God I never saw you, Mag.”

Last two lines: “I wish to God I never saw you, Mag. I wish to God the kids had never come.”

Beyond the down-to-earth and down-and-out, Sandburg wrote on traditional themes, including the following themes with representative examples:

LOVE: “Home,” “Red-Headed Restaurant Cashier,” “Gone”

NATURE: “Branches,” “Apple Blossoms,” “Peach Blossoms”

DEATH: “Anna Imroth,” “Southern Pacific,” “Limited”

RELIGION: “Broken Tabernacles” (Hypocrisy); “Child” (Jesus at Twelve in the Temple); “To a Contemporary Bunkshooter” (A Scorching Critique of Evangelist Billy Sunday (1862-1935).

FAMILY: Carl wrote poems to his wife Lilian, whom he nicknamed Paula (“The Great Hunt”). He also gave pet names to Margaret (“Spink”); Janet “Skabootch”); and Helga (“Swipes”). He did not nickname Madeline who died in infancy.

He wrote a tribute to Lilian’s brother, noted photographer Edward Steichen (“Four Steichen Prints”). A 1955 exhibition “The Family of Man,” 503 Steichen pictures, at New York City’s Museum of Modern Art led to a joint venture between the brothers-in-law for a book of the same title.

## LINCOLN

Sandburg received two Pulitzer Prizes, one for poetry, the other for the last four volumes of his six-volume biography *Abraham Lincoln, The War Years*. He also wrote biographies of Lincoln for young people as well as poems on Lincoln.

### BIOGRAPHICAL POEMS

He wrote poems on a variety of historical figures:

Sculptor Constantin Brancusi (“Brancusi”)

Japanese painter Katsushika Hokusai (“His Own Face Hidden”)

Famous fiction writers “Jack London and O. Henry” whom Sandburg identifies as heavy drinkers: “Both were jailbirds . . . speaking best with one foot on a brass rail; a beer glass in the left hand and the right hand employed for gestures.”

He wrote about three international violinists: Austrian Fritz Kreisler; Mischa Elman, born in Ukraine; and Jan Kubelik, from Czechoslovakia — Bohemia in the poem — now the Czech Republic.

Another trio includes daring young adults who made headlines but died all too soon;

Adelaide Crapsey (“Adelaide Crapsey,” 1878-1914), a poet known for creating the five-line poetic form cinquain, lines one and five, two syllables; line two, four syllables; line three, six syllables; line four, eight syllables.

Lincoln Beachey (“To Beachey 1912,” 1887-1915), widely regarded as the pioneer American stunt pilot, drowned at age twenty-eight when the wings dropped off and the plane crashed into coastal waters.

Inez Milholland, lawyer and suffragist (“Repetitions,” 1886-1916), was famous for leading a suffrage parade on a white horse. She literally gave her life for women’s right to vote, dying of exhaustion from a hectic schedule of speaking and travel.

Sandburg also wrote humorous poems about himself: “Savior Faire” (French for knowing how to speak and act appropriately) recalls a trip to Sweden, his ancestral home. He imagines himself as King Carl XV!! Then reality sets in as he pictures older Swedes resenting and rejecting an American King Carl.

“Chicago Poet” looks into the mirror and his image does everything he does — except talk back. Then he says he “saluted a nobody” and calls himself six bad names: liar, fool, dreamer, play-actor, soldier, dusty drinker of dust.

The final word:

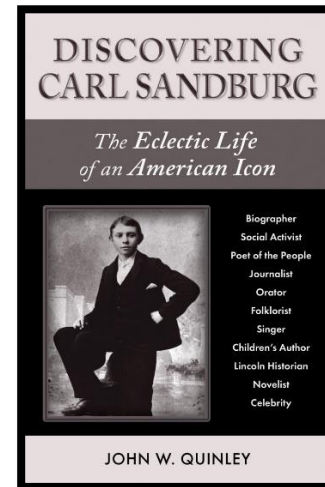
*Ah! he will go with me  
Down the dark stairway  
When nobody else is looking,  
When everybody else is gone.  
He locks his elbow in mine.  
I lose all — but not him.*

## **DISCOVERING CARL SANDBURG, THE ECLECTIC LIFE OF AN AMERICAN ICON**

By Dr. John W. Quinley

*Paperback priced at \$16.95. Available at KDP-Amazon & Ingram Spark (Barnes & Noble). Also available from the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association Museum Store in Galesburg, Illinois. Phone: 309-342-2361.*

[**Ed. Note:** Dr. John W. Quigley was raised in Maywood, Illinois—just a few blocks away from where Sandburg lived thirty years earlier. He is a retired college administrator and faculty member. He taught classes in history, government, and humanities and currently works as an adjunct instructor for American history for Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College in North Carolina. He and his wife Melissa live in Hendersonville, NC—just a few miles from Sandburg’s former home.]



Everyone knew his name.... During the first half of the twentieth century Carl Sandburg seemed to be everywhere and do everything: poet and political activist, investigative reporter, columnist, and film critic, lecturer, folk singer, and musicologist; Lincoln biographer and historian; children’s author; novelist; and media celebrity. In number of books sold, platform appearances delivered, and honors bestowed, he was one of the most successful American poets of the century. At his death in 1967, six thousand mourners gathered at the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C. to pay their respects. But as time went on, his fame began to fade, and by the twenty-first century, the public knew little, if anything, about his legacy.

*Discovering Carl Sandburg* fills the gap for a new generation of readers. The opening chapter describes Sandburg’s humble beginnings in Galesburg, Illinois and the final chapter reflects on his legacy. The remaining chapters discuss a different aspect of his achievements or touch upon his personal life—such as his wife’s world-famous goats. Historical context, humorous anecdotes, examples of his poetry and prose, and insightful quotations from authors who wrote about Sandburg provide fresh insight.

Sandburg’s eclectic life and works will amaze you. Come discover—or rediscover—this remarkable American icon. He deserves to regain his place in American culture.

## INTERESTING FAMILY CONNECTION TO CARL SANDBURG & KRANS FAMILIES

By Terry Bruner

It is always interesting to imagine that you might have a connection to a famous person, but in my case, I found there is one in my family! My second great grandparents John and Christina Algren immigrated from Sweden in 1856, settling first in Galesburg, then in Henderson, and next near Soperville.

The connection is that the Algrens, and later on, their oldest son and his wife Andrew and Sophia Algren lived across the lane from John and Emma Krans. The Krans and Algrens settled in the Soperville area at approximately the same time, 1870. Living across the lane on Soperville Road, they had to have known each other—Swedes and Swedish immigrants in particular, were anxious to meet others who shared their heritage and values.

But while the Algrens owned a tiny five-acre farm, the Krans owned a busy and industrious thirty-acre farm, which they called Strawberry Hill. John Algren, and later his son, tended to their tiny farm and also worked as coal miners at one of Soperville's several small coal mines. Both are listed as coal miners in census records.

My 2nd great grandparents could not have known the Sandburgs, since August Sandburg immigrated in 1872 and married Clara in 1874. Carl would have been the same age as my Uncle Alfred, as both were born in 1878.

John and Christina Algren both passed away in 1870, and with the small farm going to Andrew and Sophia, their brood of six children likely played with Charlie Krans, their neighbor. And since the Sandburg and Algren families had children of roughly the same age, it is possible that the children played together when the Sandburgs visited their cousins, the Krans.

Could my grandfather, Albert Algren, born in 1872, possibly have been a Sunday afternoon playmate with Carl Sandburg? We will never know, but it is a nice thing to think about!

John and Emma Krans were members of Henderson Grove's Messiah Lutheran Church, and the Algrens were members there as well. In fact, Sophia was a Sunday school teacher, according to church records.

John Krans' Aunt Lena was a cousin to Carl Sandburg's mother Clara, and Sandburg writes of going out to the Krans farm every month in *Always the Young Strangers*, his autobiography. The Krans Farm flirted with being famous, because Sandburg wrote about it with great affection. "About once a month of a Sunday morning, father would throw the harness on Old Dolly, and the word was "We are going to the Kranses." The Kranses were "the nearest kinfolk we had in America except for one other family in Galesburg," Sandburg wrote. Their house was "seven miles out near a small coal-mine crossroads with a post office named Soperville." The Kranses talk "ran warm and pleasant. They were strong for work, liked it, and talked it in those years."

He also wrote that John Krans had a wooden barn with a dirt floor, three horses, and four cows. "Here we saw hands at udders, milk streaming into pails, pails carried up the slope to the house thirty yards away. Their cellar had a clean hard floor and plank shelves with a long line of crocks into which the milk was poured. We saw the yellow cream at the top of the crocks and saw cream churned to butter. For the first time, we drank milk from cows that we saw give the milk. And for the first time we had fried eggs having seen the hens that laid the eggs."

The flirtation with "being famous" for the Krans family was that magnificent barn, which stood (or should I say, leaned) until it had to be torn down in about 1980. I can remember seeing it when my husband and I visited his parents and aunts and uncles in Soperville. The barn was BIG and yes, it leaned. While many called it "Carl Sandburg's Barn," my husband's Soperville family simply called it "The Leaning Barn."



"The Leaning Barn"

Charlie Krans, son of John and Emma, told Sandburg, "I got some poles to hold it on the east side and the wind holds it up on the west."



Sandburg visits his cousin Charlie Krans on Charlie's Soperville farm in 1953.

In my mind, sitting on my deck tonight, overlooking soybeans, and huge trees, and bales of hay, and waiting for deer to creep out of the woods and visit us, I see Carl Sandburg's Barn. And I hope my grandfather and his siblings had to chance to meet the Sandburgs. I think they would have liked them as much as I am sure they liked the Krans family.

## CARL SANDBURG'S COLLEGE YEARS

By Dr. John E. Hallwas

[Ed. Note: This article appeared in Dr. Hallwas' "Visions and Values" column in the March 25, 1984 *Macomb Journal*.]

Thirty years ago [from 1984] Carl Sandburg's *Always the Young Strangers* was greeted with widespread critical acclaim. Playwright Robert E. Sherwood even called it "the best autobiography ever written by an American."

He was wrong. Benjamin Franklin, Frederick Douglass, Henry Adams, and others have written better ones. But Sandburg did produce a fine book, a warm and engaging account of his rather ordinary life in Galesburg from 1878 to 1898.

Two years later he went to work on a sequel to it, producing fifteen chapters by the end of 1955, but the demands of public life and the disabilities of advanced age kept him from finishing that volume, called *Ever the Winds of Chance*.

It finally appeared last fall, printed from a typescript owned by his daughter Margaret.

Although incomplete and unrevised, *Ever the Winds of Chance* is not just a sourcebook for scholars. In crisp and unpretentious prose, it depicts the intellectual awakening of Illinois' best-loved poet.

Oddly enough, Sandburg's failure to finish the book made it more unified than the projected volume would have been. It opens with his enrollment at Galesburg's Lombard College in 1898 and closes several years later with an offer to work in Wisconsin as a labor organizer.

Sandburg took that offer. It was the first job that really engaged him, heart and soul, the first that gave his blossoming verbal skills a serious purpose. He became a crusader for the working man, a speaker and writer for the Socialist labor movement. His intellectual vagabondage, the first stage of his struggle for self-realization, was over.

But that stage is the subject of *Ever the Winds of Chance*. That's why the book is significant. As Sandburg says in Chapter 1, after depicting his start in college, "I was a human struggler in a new loneliness good to know and good to grapple with for whatever might come of it. The college years would end sometime. And beyond that—what? Fred Dickinson knew he would make himself a lawyer and a good one (which he did). Jack Anderson and John Donnington Bartlett saw themselves as future doctors (and so it happened). Spencer Howell slated himself to be a chemist (which also happened). But me, in my little hallroom, I had wonderings and hopes, but they were vague and foggy. I couldn't see myself filling some niche in what is called a career."

Sandburg's quandary about his career unites him with some of the most sensitive young people of every generation, but unlike so many others, he approached his education enthusiastically, even without a career goal. The inescapable impression is that he was better off in the long run. His classmates pursued careers. He pursued himself.

Even the part-time jobs he held were regarded as aspects of his education, facets of an exciting, open-ended process of self-realization. And with respect to college, he recognized that intellectual growth is not the result of study alone, but of interaction and reflection as well. Real education is a broad process, not a narrow pursuit.

All of that is emphasized later in the book, when he decides to leave college, still lacking a career objective—but committed by then to writing:

"Where was I going? These jobs, contacts, activities, what were they doing to me? Was I growing or getting anywhere? I believed I was, though I couldn't say how or wherein. The barn work, chicken dressing, riding my bicycle to a fire. . . . I was happy yet restless with an endless unrest. Editing and writing on the college paper and *The Cannibal* (yearbook), writing and speaking orations in contests, and playing roles as an actor before audiences . . . every day having fellowship with young men and women who were a stimulus to me, some of them having minds that in various fields so far surpassed my own that I had not only respect but reverence for those minds—all of this was outside the education I had been getting. What was going on inside of me? What was I headed for in the big world beyond the college days?"

His comment about the superior minds of some classmates raises an intriguing question: Why was Sandburg the only Lombard student of his era to achieve national acclaim?

Perhaps he did more to develop his potential than any of the others. As the last three chapters reveal, he continued to read widely and write continually after leaving college. While he sold stereoscopic views, he pored over Shakespeare, Whitman, Ibsen, and Zola. As he sold advertising for *The Lyceumite* magazine in Chicago, he absorbed ideas of William James, Thorstein Veblen, and other contemporaries.

Or perhaps Sandburg simply had an enormous capacity for growth. If so, he did indeed have much in common with Lincoln, whose incredible development he would eventually chronicle in more than 3,000 pages.

Whatever the case, *Ever the Winds of Chance* is a revealing volume about Sandburg's college years—and about Lombard College itself, a Universalist school devoted to intellectual freedom. (It eventually closed in the 1930s.) The book is filled with appreciation for other minds that influenced his own, the best of which belonged to Philip Green Wright. "the Illinois Prairie Leonardo," who taught mathematics, astronomy, economics, and composition.

Sandburg devotes a chapter to Wright, who would be unknown outside of Galesburg if it hadn't been for his illustrious student. It closes with the kind of tribute that all teachers long for but few ever receive:

"I had four years of almost daily contact with him. . . . And there was never a time when he didn't deepen whatever of reverence I had for the human mind and the workings of a vast mysterious universe."

If Lombard had any serious shortcomings, Sandburg didn't notice them. Not surprisingly, one reviewer has commented that *Ever the Winds of Chance* "could serve as a recruitment tool for small and serious liberal arts colleges."

Perhaps. But in spite of his appreciation for the intellectual stimulus of Lombard, Sandburg does not come across as a product of the school so much as the product of his own struggle to educate himself. He derived much from his college years, and the years that followed, because he was determined to do so.

*Ever the Winds of Chance* reminds us that all education is self-education. There is no other kind. And those who approach college with that understanding are likely to continue the process of learning and growing long after they leave.

Sandburg certainly did.

### **A NOTE ON SANDBURG'S "AMERICANESSE" AND THE NOBEL PRIZE**

By Dr. Donald Phillip Verene

There is a view that claims Carl Sandburg received the Nobel Prize. In the Foreword to her book, *The Best of Galesburg*, a collection of historical photographs with texts, Andrea Vitale says: "Galesburg also is distinguished as the home of some famous sons, perhaps the most famous, Carl Sandburg, Nobel Prize winning author" (St. Louis: G. Bradley Publishing, 1999; reprint 2014).

Sandburg never received the Nobel Prize. Penelope Niven, in *Carl Sandburg: A Biography* (New York: Scribner's, 1991), makes it clear that Sandburg "was sometimes mentioned as a Nobel candidate over the years, but he never received the honor" (p. 489). Niven explains that in the winter of 1932, Sandburg and his publisher, Alfred Harcourt, talked about whether he might ever be considered seriously for the Nobel Prize. Sandburg's "decisive judgment" was that he would never be considered because his language was "too Americanese" to suit the Europeans. Niven also reports that Sandburg told Harcourt, "too much of my language . . . might seem almost nationalistic in its flaunting of the North American airs and syllables."

Niven reports that when Ernest Hemingway received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954, he said "I would have been most happy to know that the prize had been awarded to Carl Sandburg." Sandburg telegraphed Hemingway: "Your unprecedented comment on the award deeply appreciated & understood if only as fellowship between two Illinois boys." (p. 635). When John Steinbeck received the Nobel Prize in 1962, he was quoted as saying it should have gone to Sandburg.

Sandburg, like H. L. Mencken, listened carefully to American speech. Mencken produced a work on its development, *The American Language* (1918 and revised editions). Sandburg preserved this use of words in every poem. His masterpiece, *The People, Yes* (1936), is a compendium of "Americanese" of unforgettable lines such

as "This old anvil laughs at many broken hammers." Language embodies who a people are. It is a possession that cannot be taken away once it is written down. It becomes part of the scroll of human memory. "Memory is when you look back / and the answers float in / to who? what? when? where?" (*Complete Poems*, p. 629).

Sandburg is one of the custodians of this memory. Sandburg learned this language in Galesburg, and he said that Galesburg "burned" in his memory. He said, "Galesburg, as I look back on it, was a piece of the American Republic." Sandburg was not a provincial poet, even though what is purely American could always be heard in his voice, felt in his attitude, and seen in the words on the page. What the Nobel Committee likely missed is that his American speech also captures what is completely human. In his involvement with his brother-in-law, Edward Steichen, in *The Family of Man* (1955) his universal perspective is unmistakable.

Although Sandburg did not receive the Nobel Prize, he received the Pulitzer Prize in history in 1940, the result of his work on Lincoln, and the Pulitzer Prize in 1951 for *The Complete Poems of Carl Sandburg* (published in 1950).

The poems of the Nebraska poet, Ted Kooser, remind me, in many respects, of Sandburg's poems. In connection to becoming the 13th Poet Laureate and Consultant in Poetry to the Library of Congress, Kooser was interviewed by the *New York Times*. As I remember it, the interviewer asked him what European poems he liked. Kooser was stumped. He said he probably ought to read more European poems. Kooser writes about, and among, his neighbors. Who he is and who they are come forth in his poems. Consider an early two-line poem, "Obit For John Berryman": "He had a mind like a fire station / And a heart like a shelf of old hats" (*Not Coming To Be Barked At: Poems by Ted Kooser*, Milwaukee: Pentagram Press, 1976). His poems, like Sandburg's, are hometown. It seems that the problem of relating distinctively American poetry to Europe continues.

In his late poem, "The Abracadabra Boys," Sandburg makes clear what the true poet always faces: "Pointing at you, at us, at the rabble, they sigh and say, these abracadabra boys, 'They lack jargons'" (*Complete Poems*, p. 643). Only the true poets can overcome the jargons and keep for us the essence of what it means to be human, providing in their images of words who the people are and what they know themselves to be.

### **SANDBURG & THE LAST DAYS OF EUGENE DEBS**

By Rich Hanson

A number of years ago I accompanied Mike Hobbs to Macomb, Illinois to hear folk singer, social activist, and "professional hellraiser" (her words, not mine), the late Anne Feeney perform her rousing labor and protest music. One of her choices was a song paying tribute to Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist presidential candidate who was incarcerated by the Wilson administration for "sedition" and "espionage" and jailed as a "traitor to his country." His only crime: opposing the war to end all wars. He knew better.

Anne portrayed Debs as a martyr and a visionary ahead of his time. The first three lines that follow are hers, but accurately convey his beliefs. The second four lines, the chorus of her song, is a quote from Debs himself.

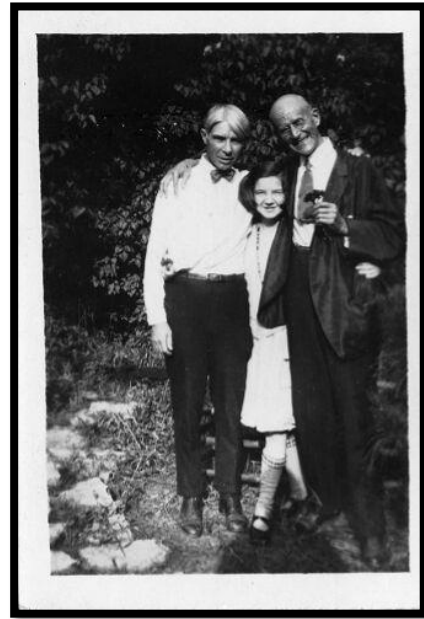
*Speak truth to power and they call it revolution.  
Open your hearts' and it's so easy to see  
Punishing the poor is just a rich man's solution.*

*While there is a lower class I am in it  
While there is injustice it is done to me.  
Where there is a criminal element, I am of it.  
Where there is a soul in prison I am not free."*

In 1923 President Harding commuted the remainder of Debs' ten-year prison term. At sixty-six years old and in bad health he badly needed rest. He entered the Lindlahr Sanitarium in Elmhurst, a Chicago suburb. Coincidentally, it wasn't far from the home of Carl and Paula Sandburg. Debs wrote a letter about the poet's first visit to him to his friend, David Karsner, which Karsner later reprinted as part of a series of letters from Debs in the Socialist newspaper *The New York Call*:

*And a wonderful two hours with Carl Sandburg and his sweet little eleven year old daughter this afternoon, and his visit rested, refreshed and rejuvenated me. We sat in the shade of the great old elms and poured out our souls to each other. I had not seen him for fourteen years. Since then he has scaled the peaks and written his name upon the stars. Carl Sandburg is one of the very few really great poets of our day, and the future will know him to the remotest generation. He lives only three blocks from here and I shall have his three little household gods for playmates and that will be the most vital part of my restorative treatment.... Last night I was with Carl Sandburg and Sinclair Lewis at the Sandburg home till midnight and then that beautiful brace brought me home. It was a wonderful occasion-an event in our lives. Mrs. Sandburg had her mother, and the three dear children did the hospitable services for us and we were in paradise after our own hearts.*

*Carl came with his guitar Saturday evening and gave the patients here a most charming entertainment in folklore. It was a complete conquest and they all love him. Lewis will also entertain them..... Lewis and Sandburg are fit companions, genial, fun-loving, whole-hearted and generous, as well as princes of the pen and masters of the literary art. Lewis and Sandburg as distinctly American novelist and poet, with the cosmic understanding of the universal appeal, have already acquitted themselves with enviable distinction and achieved enduring fame, but they are still in their adolescence and have but laid the foundation of the temple that will bear in fadeless letter their deathless names.*



Eugene Debs with Carl & Margaret Sandburg in 1922.  
Source: *The Rare Book & Manuscript Library, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.*

Sandburg had deserted the Socialists in 1917, espousing support for the war that they opposed to their peril. Debs did not seem to hold it against Sandburg though. He only brought up the matter once, in the form of a joke, and Sandburg went on in later years to clarify his stance. "I fight against wars between wars, but once we are in it I give it everything I have."

Before his death at Linddlahe in 1926 Debs seemed to take comfort and find pleasure in his neighbor's visits. He argued with Sandburg about historical facts concerning John Brown and would sing along when Carl brought along his guitar and strummed melodies.

Harry Golden, in his book of stories and snippets about Sandburg avers that Sandburg never lost his affection for Eugene V. Debs.

"We can say that Debs has been one of his heroes, along with Clarence Darrow and John P. Atgeld, and they are still his heroes. But Carl Sandburg has never been doctrinaire (I doubt seriously whether Eugene V. Debs himself was a doctrinaire Socialist), and it was a rather simple matter for Carl to take Franklin D. Roosevelt and Justice William O. Douglas, and now Chief Justice Earl Warren in stride." "I am in their stream," he says.

## 2022 CSHSA MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

Thanks to all for your continuing support! If you have not renewed in 2022, find a form with membership options for paying dues on page 8 of this newsletter.

**2022 MEMBERSHIP FORM**

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**Thank you for your support!**

**CARL  
SANDBURG**  
*"...for it could be a place  
to come and remember."* **HISTORIC  
SITE  
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*The **Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association** promotes awareness of the historical and cultural significance of Carl Sandburg and the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site in Galesburg, Illinois. We support a variety of educational programs and the collection, preservation, and display of materials which demonstrate the life, times, and achievements of Carl Sandburg.*

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED



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