
INKLINGS AND IDLINGS

The Newsletter of the Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association

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Fall 2014

FROM SITE SUP'T. MARTHA DOWNEY

The Sandburg community has lost its greatest advocate with the death of Penelope Niven on August 28, 2014. In 1991 with the publication of *Carl Sandburg: A Biography* she became the foremost Carl Sandburg scholar. Her research for that book was meticulous, comprehensive, and groundbreaking, her words chosen with care and precision. Penelope Niven's biography is the authoritative biography of Carl Sandburg. Others had written of his literary life, memories of his life, and Sandburg himself wrote about his life, but Niven's scholarship has given us the complete life.

In order to inspire young people with the story of Sandburg's life Penny wrote *Carl Sandburg: Adventures of a Poet*. For this book she received an International Reading Association Prize "for exceptionally distinguished literature for children."

In addition to the Sandburg biography, Penny began the Carl Sandburg Oral History Project. Among those interviewed for this project were his daughters, Norman Corwin, William Jovanovich, Pete Seeger, his Quaker housekeeper, Gene Kelly, and many others. She also wrote the biography of Edward Steichen, Sandburg's brother-in-law, giving insight into that creative photographer who was an important part of Sandburg's life.

Throughout Paul Bonesteel's documentary "The Day Carl Sandburg Died" Penny is seen and heard discussing aspects of Sandburg's long and remarkable life. Those familiar with her biography can sense its influence on the film.

Penelope Niven's legacy was secure with her work on Sandburg, but that was not enough for this remarkable woman. She produced a biography of Thornton Wilder and co-wrote a book with James Earl Jones. She also wrote her own memoir *Swimming Lessons*. For twelve years she was writer-in-residence at Salem College, North

Carolina. That college has an international writing prize named in her honor.

Additional honors she was awarded were two honorary doctorates, The Thornton Wilder Visiting Fellowship at the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University, and three fellowships from the National Endowment for the Humanities. She also received the highest honor the State of North Carolina can bestow on an author, The North Carolina Award in Literature.

Here in Galesburg and at the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site, Penny will be greatly missed. She came to Galesburg numerous times for research and to appear at the Sandburg Days *festival for the mind*. She was a strong and gracious advocate for the Site and the Galesburg community. Many of us had the opportunity to hear her speak or participate in one of her writer's workshops. Some of us had the privilege of talking with her and calling her friend. She was an inspiration.

The first time I met Penelope Niven was at the book signing at the Site for her recently published *Carl Sandburg: A Biography*. The graciousness she demonstrated that day was a hallmark of Penelope Niven. I came to the book signing, bought her book which I had her autograph. I remember distinctly sitting down beside her, and as she opened my new book, she began asking me questions about my work. There were others waiting, but she graciously took time to visit with me and express her belief about the importance of historic sites.

The power of historic sites is expressed in her introduction to the Carl Sandburg biography as she tells of her first encounter with Sandburg,

My first encounter with Sandburg came on the summer day of 1976 when I explored Connemara as a tourist. I saw a writer's workshop, the accrued evidence of books, papers and other tools of the literary life. His presence was palpable in almost every room. Spiders spun daily webs between the rough wood shelves arranged like library stacks in

the cool stone cellar. The house was burdened with books, more than ten thousand of them, arranged in comfortable order on shelves reaching to the high ceilings.

Sandburg's papers spilled from desks to sturdy wooden fruit crates to tattered cardboard cartons from the grocery store. Within easy reach on cluttered desktops were letters from Robert Frost, John Kennedy, Archibald MacLeish, and H.L. Mencken. Sandburg's creased hats were there, his canes, his guitars, and buckeyes, smooth stones, dried ginkgo leaves, pine cones—talismans of a thousand strolls by day and night on the paths lacing his property.

I left Connemara haunted by Sandburg's presence in this house and compelled by the evidence of his work and character. . . Back home in Maryland in my own busy life, I could not forget Sandburg. . . I was curious now about the shadow whose spirit seemed so alive in Flat Rock.

It is a powerful statement about the impact a historic site can have on an individual. Penny's scholarship on Carl Sandburg is proof of the inspiration historic sites can provide.

On her website, Penny wrote, "I want my epitaph to testify that I have been a loving mother, wife, daughter, sister, aunt, and friend; and I have taught, written, and lived with joy."



Penelope Niven in Galesburg for Sandburg Days, April, 2014.
Photo by Karen S. Lynch.

CARL SANDBURG AND GALESBURG

By Penelope Niven

*(Ed. Note: Three days before she passed away in North Carolina, Penelope Niven e-mailed me this story for **Inklings and Idlings** in response to my request that she comment on the long-held local rumor that Sandburg did not like Galesburg. She was asked that question during her lectures in Galesburg during Sandburg Days last April. In her professional, conscientious way she acknowledged that she had gotten her story to me "in advance of your August 28, 2014 deadline." She added, "Please let me know if it is too long and I will cut it." She did not want the story reprinted without her permission. "This is an exclusive for **Inklings and Idlings**," she wrote. She signed her story "Penelope Niven, Author of **Carl Sandburg: A Biography and Carl Sandburg: Adventures of a Poet**.*

This story may not be reprinted without the permission of Penelope Niven's estate.)

I am often asked how Carl Sandburg felt about Galesburg, Illinois, his hometown. Sometimes people tell me that he hated Galesburg. "Why do you think that he disliked his hometown?" I ask, for a biographer always wants to document assertions which are offered as facts. Most of the time, the response is that people heard it somewhere, or that other people told them it was true. In more than twenty years of doing Sandburg research, including conducting more than 150 taped interviews with people who knew Sandburg, I've never come across evidence that Sandburg disliked Galesburg.

Some people have reported that Sandburg himself said so in his autobiography, *Always the Young Strangers*. Perhaps they are thinking of one line from that book that Sandburg composed in his writing room on the third floor of his house in Flat Rock, North Carolina, where he lived from 1945 until his death July 22, 1967. I grew up in North Carolina and I have always thought it interesting that Sandburg spent a significant amount of his time in the North Carolina mountains writing about the Illinois prairie, especially Galesburg, the town where he grew up. *Always the Young Strangers* was published in 1953 when he was 75 years old. In the second paragraph on page 377 of the chapter entitled "Hobo," Sandburg wrote:

What came over me in those years 1896 and 1897 wouldn't be easy to tell. I hated my home town and yet I loved it. And I hated and loved myself about the same as I did the town and the people. I knew then as I know now that it was a pretty good home town to grow up in. I came to see that my trouble was inside of myself more than it was in the town and the people.

Sandburg was writing about himself when he was 18 or 19. I could have written those words about myself at 18 or 19 in my own small home town in North Carolina. At that age I felt that dichotomy—both loving and at times hating the town where I grew up, eager to leave and explore the wider world, but always coming back to the town with renewed appreciation and affection. I've talked to many people who have said that they felt that way as teenagers about the villages or towns or cities where they grew up.

"Please read further," I encourage those who have read only one small part of this passage in *Always the Young Strangers* and concluded that Carl Sandburg hated his hometown. In fairness, you need to read all the pages that come before page 377, and all the pages that come afterward. Only then will a clear picture of Sandburg's feelings for Galesburg emerge, along with a vividly positive portrait of the town itself.

Sandburg wrote about Galesburg and the prairie in poetry as well as prose. The landscape and the symbolism of the prairie animate much of his poetry, especially the volume named *Cornhuskers*, which begins with a long poem entitled "Prairie": "I was born on the prairie and the milk of its wheat, the red of its clover, the eyes of its women, gave me a song and a slogan," Sandburg wrote. Near the end of that rhapsodic poem are these words: "O prairie mother, I am one of your boys. I have loved the prairie as a man with a heart shot full of pain over love." Those lines could only have been written by a poet who truly knew and loved the landscape—the place—the spirit— evoked in the poetry.

You find strong evidence of Sandburg's affection and regard for Galesburg in his prose and his poetry, and in words he writes about his friends there. There are rich memories of his boyhood throughout *Always the Young Strangers*. He took particular pride in his service in the Spanish American War, and in 1940 attended a reunion of his Company C, Sixth Infantry Regiment of Illinois Volunteers in Galesburg. In 1898 when they volunteered for war service, there were twelve college boys and at least twenty farmers in the company, and many of them had relatives who had fought in the Civil War. An estimated ten thousand citizens thronged to the Galesburg armory and the train station to send them on their way to war. Sandburg paid tribute to his fellow soldiers in *Always The Young Strangers*, and in a letter in 1940

to his publisher, Alfred Harcourt: "Most of them are the real stuff and having had little fear of death or hardship will take old age and decrepitude without whimpering." Sandburg also wrote in his autobiography that many of his fellow soldiers remained his lifelong friends.

He was grateful to other friends in Galesburg who were planning to preserve and restore his birthplace, but he wrote to Adda George in 1947 that he was "not at ease about a non-posthumous B-P: it would require an ego and assurance I don't have." Yet, he told her, "a man must meet more than halfway the clean and fine regard of certain old and tried friends." He thanked her for her "extraordinary sincerity and thoughtfulness."

On February 4, 1962, Sandburg wrote to Mrs. Charles Bednar, a leader of the Carl Sandburg Association in Galesburg, about the idea of enlarging the Birthplace. He was concerned that an expansion might be risky, he said, and require more supervision. "You are doing rather wonderfully with the place as it is," he told Juanita Bednar. "I love you for the keen and intelligent way you have handled a responsibility that has been incessant and not easy. Please keep it simple like the life of old August Sandburg, who married Clara Matilda Anderson. And please know I salute you on being so thoughtful and so loyal. I doubt whether at seventy-three or even at eighty-three you will have a worthy successor."

How pleased they would both be to see that Juanita Bednar's son, Charles "Chuck" Bednar, Jr., the current president of the Galesburg Public Art Commission, has been his mother's "worthy successor."

Finally there is this persuasive evidence of how the Poet of the People felt about Galesburg, where he was born January 6, 1878, on a cornhusk mattress in a three-room frame house on Third Street near the CB&Q Railroad tracks where his father worked for decades. Carl Sandburg's ashes were buried October 1, 1967 at his birthplace in Galesburg, his grave marked by a boulder named Remembrance Rock, after his only novel. His beloved wife, Lilian Anna Maria Elizabeth Magdalene Steichen Sandburg whom he called Paula, was buried there as well in 1977, and later, so were other family members.

In life, Carl Sandburg left Galesburg as a young man to travel the United States and the world, making an international name for himself. In death, he came home to Galesburg to stay.

FALL GARDEN CLEAN-UP

By Site Sup't. Martha Downey

It is fall, and the garden at Carl Sandburg's Birthplace is ready for its last clean-up of the year. Saturday, October 4, a yard and garden clean-up morning is planned at the Carl Sandburg State Historic Site, 313 E. Third Street. From 9 am until noon volunteers led by Knox County Master Gardeners will be pruning shrubs, dead heading flowers, cutting back flowers, and pulling weeds. There will be coffee and sweet treats to enjoy.

Volunteers are needed to help with this fall clean-up, so bring your gloves and favorite garden tools to join those working that morning. The Knox County Master Gardeners have provided expertise and leadership all this year in caring for the Site's gardens. The Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association is sponsoring this garden open house.

If you are not able to attend October 4 but are interested in volunteering, call Martha Downey at 309-927-3345 or email sitesupt@sandburg.org.

TEMPERANCE

By Barbara Schock

In the 1830s when the first settlers came to Knox County, liquor (mostly whiskey and hard cider) was bought by the gallon or barrel. It was used by families every day. Glasses of hard cider were passed around before breakfast to give one an appetite. John Adams, the second president of the United States, was among those who so indulged themselves. The addition of bitters or herbs to whiskey was considered a sovereign remedy for any and all ailments. During harvest time alcohol was used to provide energy and relieve aches and pains of the hard work. Historians estimate five to seven gallons of alcoholic beverages per person were consumed per year.

During the winter of 1836 a temperance society was formed in Log City, the location of the temporary log cabins where the members of the Gale Colony lived before constructing homes in

Galesburg. After the city received its charter in 1857, at the first election voters approved the prohibition of alcohol. This seconded the determination of the founders who had required all real estate deeds to include a prohibition of alcohol on the premises.

The restrictions did not eliminate the liquor traffic. Bootleggers provided spirits to some of the drugstores and the hotels. Nevertheless, for the next forty years waves of temperance activity washed over the countryside with varying degrees of success. They were often connected with the religious reawakenings among the Protestant residents of the Midwest.

In 1872 Galesburg granted licenses for the sale of liquor by the drink. It was hoped that action would diminish the illegal trade in liquor. Two years later mass meetings in the city resulted in the revoking of the licenses.

The local chapter of the Woman's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) was organized in Galesburg in 1874. The women arranged mass meetings, gospel meetings, and lectures to attract young and old to their cause. Miss Mary Allen West enrolled 500 children in the Band of Hope. An oath to abstain from all forms of alcohol for life was administered. The children were barely old enough to understand the words of the pledge.



By 1878 a tidal wave of interest in temperance swept Knox County. People wore ribbons on their lapels to indicate they had taken the oath of temperance. The WCTU opened a coffee room on Prairie Street to serve those who had given up the life of intemperance. Townships in the county organized clubs to support the cause. The leaders conducted lyceums and musical programs to attract young people to the meetings in the hope they would pledge to give up drinking alcoholic beverages. District school houses in each township were the centers of these activities.

Carl Sandburg was born in 1878, and a few years later, as a lad, took the oath at the City Mission. The oath didn't stop him from tasting the contents of the barrels and bottles stored in the cellar of Dr. Harvey Craig's drugstore on Main Street. Part of Carl's job was to refill containers for the pharmacist to use in dispensing prescriptions. He liked the 20-year-old rum, but whiskey wasn't to his taste.

Later in life Sandburg developed an appreciation for fine Scotch whiskey. When he visited friends around the country during his travels, they would be sure to have a bottle or two on hand to accompany the conversations they were bound to have with the poet. On occasion Sandburg would have a bottle in his shopping bag luggage to share with his hosts. Temperance could not hold him in its thrall.

STAN SHOVER 2014 GALESBURG LABOR DAY PARADE GRAND MARSHALL

By Mike Hobbs

CSHSA board member Stan Shover was Grand Marshall for the 2014 Galesburg Labor Day Parade, the second oldest continuously-running Labor Day Parade in the United States. Stan's public teaching career spanned sixty-six years. He began as an eighteen year old teacher in Slough Island country school near London Mills, IL in 1946. Later he was principal at Fairview and Abingdon elementary schools, teacher and counselor in the Galesburg school district, adult education teacher at Carl Sandburg College, and finally substitute teacher in area schools. He was the first president of the Galesburg Federation of Teachers, Local 1491, AFL-CIO, when it formed in the early 1960's and then was president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers.



Stan Shover, 2014 Galesburg Labor Day Parade Grand Marshall

In grade school in the 1930's Stan developed an interest in Carl Sandburg. He liked him and Mark Twain, because they were distinctly American writers. Since Stan was raised on a farm, he also liked Sandburg, because he was raised in a small city in a rural area, and because he represented the common man. Early in his teaching career he studied Sandburg to share information with his students about this local man, and he took them to visit his birthplace. It was difficult to get his students interested in poetry, but reading Sandburg's poems interested them. He said that Sandburg had a great vocabulary, and he liked the words he made up. Those made-up words appealed to his students. He also liked Sandburg's idea of people working together for the common good.

Stan was glad that the name Carl Sandburg was chosen as the name of the new junior college in the late 1960's. He said Sandburg would have been proud to know that that had been done. He praised Carl Sandburg College for being one of the first junior colleges in the State of Illinois to teach adult education, including the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) program.

The first Sandburg book that he bought was Harry Golden's biography *Carl Sandburg* (1961). After he got acquainted with Sandburg's daughter Helga, he asked her to autograph his Golden book.

He laughed that Helga remarked about the book, "Half of this is inaccurate, but I love Harry."

Stan has chaired the Penny Parade in recent years. He said he has very much enjoyed working on the Penny Parade, because it has educated local teachers and students about Sandburg.

One of Stan's favorite Sandburg lines is "Sometime they'll give a war and nobody will come." One of his favorite Sandburg poems is "Grass:"

Pile the bodies high at Austerlitz and Waterloo,
Shovel them under and let me work--
I am the grass; I cover all.

And pile them high at Gettysburg
And pile them high at Ypres and Verdun.
Shovel them under and let me work.
Two years, ten years, and passengers ask the
conductor:
What place is this?
Where are we now?

I am the grass.
Let me work.

A SANDBURG AFICIONADO

By Mike Hobbs

It's fun meeting a complete stranger and striking up a conversation on a subject in which you are both interested. In June I was 2,000 miles from my home in Galesburg visiting my friend Bev Kjellander in Oregon. Bev took me to many beautiful natural sites in Oregon, including Crater Lake National Park. While staying at the lodge on the rim of that majestic lake we met Alan Cooper in the Great Hall of that venerable old facility. Alan told me that from 1991 to 1999 he spent time in Urbana, Jacksonville, and Paris, IL Kraft Food plants while vice-president of operations for that company. He was headquartered in Memphis.

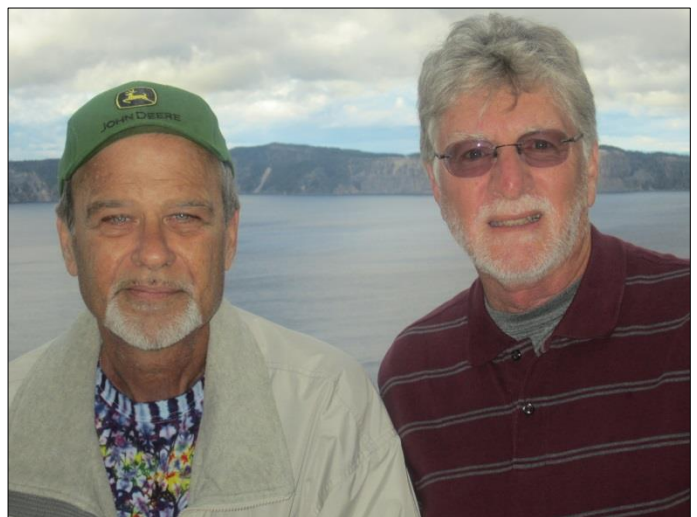
He went on to say that he currently lives in Flat Rock, NC. That statement piqued my interest. I asked him if he had ever been to nearby Connemara where Sandburg and his family lived from 1945 to 1967 and which is now a National Historic Site administered by the National Park Service. He said he lives about a mile from it and indeed had visited it many times. An avid hiker, he explored Crater Lake's trails. He has hiked a trail at

Connemara to Little Glassy Mountain, a trail Sandburg frequently hiked to a location where he spent time thinking and gazing at Mt. Pisgah, part of the Blue Ridge Mountains. I hiked that trail to Little Glassy (a little over a mile) about ten years ago when I was in my mid-50's. I huffed and puffed and marveled that Sandburg was able to make that strenuous climb in his 70's and 80's.

Alan said that the Greenville Highway goes through Flat Rock. From the Greenville Highway motorists turn onto Little River Road to get to Connemara. On the highway are signs for Connemara that describe Sandburg as "Poet of the People."

Besides hiking at Connemara Alan has toured the home and viewed the visitor orientation film. He thinks it's a functional home and noted the many, many books throughout it. He enjoyed seeing the property's small lakes, pastures, flowers, and goats. He said the home has recently been repainted.

Alan has read *Chicago Poems*. He called Sandburg the "voice of the people." He described Sandburg as "multi-talented" and "prolific" in his poetry, Lincoln biographies, children's books, song book, and novel. He thought he was "focused" on his intensive research for his Lincoln biographies. He felt that Sandburg truly enjoyed life.



Mike Hobbs & Alan Cooper at Crater Lake National Park, Oregon

FOG IN YACHATS

By Mike Hobbs

Another picturesque place in Oregon to which Bev Kjellander took me in June was the little coastal town of Yachats, noted for its views of the majestic Pacific Ocean. I saw my first whales there. The little town has a Facebook page called “Yachats Community” which showcases beautiful photos of the Pacific. A while back fog blocked the view of the ocean, so someone got on the Yachats Facebook page and made the comment, “Go away FOG.” Then a lady named Janet commented, “The fog comes on little cat feet . . .” Bev asked her, “Are you a Carl Sandburg fan, Janet?” Janet replied, “Yes! I don’t know many of his poems, but wish to learn more. My grandmother lived in San Francisco and would often recite this poem when the fog rolled in.”

SOME BIRTHPLACE HISTORY

By Mike Hobbs

Past CSHSA President Chuck Bednar gave me a copy of a letter, provided him by Knox College Archives Curator Carley Robison, written by Adda George that gives some early history of the Sandburg Birthplace after Mrs. George had rescued it from demolition. On Carl Sandburg Association stationery, it is not dated, but Chuck thinks it was written in 1946. The stationery shows CSA officers Adda George, president; Mabel Corbin, vice-president; Robert McLaughlin, recording secretary; Ethel Freeburg, treasurer; and Martha Robertson, corresponding secretary. Shown on the CSA’s National Committee are Emily Taft Douglas, Marshall Field, George W. Gale, Alfred Harcourt, Archibald MacLeish, Janet Greig Post, Paul Robeson, Orson Welles, and Quincy Wright. Among the Directors were Fanny Butcher, Mary Creighton, Harry Hansen, Mary Sandburg Johnson, and Hermann Muelder, Ralph Newman was Chicago Representative.

The letter was addressed to the Board of Trustees of Knox College from the CSA Board. It was signed by Adda George.

Gentlemen:

Literary people from various parts of the nation who come here to visit the Sandburg Birthplace sometimes ask: ‘Does Knox College realize what this little house means to her?’

The generous gifts that some of you have made toward the purchase and restoration show that you do.

The Association, hurriedly formed to save the house when it was about to be torn down, has finished the work of purchase, restoration, furnishing, and maintenance to date. The accounts of the treasurer, Mrs. C.W. Freeburg, are now being audited by Messrs. Stout and Tobin.

There is a possibility that funds may soon be available for restoring the large room at the rear of the original three-room cottage as a ‘Lincoln Room.’ It would be large enough to seat local and out-of-town groups who come there to see the memorabilia, hear Sandburg song records, etc.

The [S]tate may eventually take over maintenance (if and when they are asked); but for a few years at least it would seem advisable that maintenance should be met in some other way. Membership in the Association, which was set up to save the house, required no dues—only an initial gift.

Since Sandburg’s connection with the college in the eyes of the nation is a valuable asset to Knox, may we respectfully request that, beginning this year, some of the annual responsibility for the maintenance be assumed by the college until such time as the State does take over?

WHAT IS MINE IS MINE

*In the night and the mist these voices:
What is mine is mine and I am going to keep it.
What is yours is yours and you are welcome to keep it.
You will have to fight me to take from me what is mine.
Part of what is mine is yours and you are welcome to it.
What is yours is mine and I am going to take it from you.
In the night and the mist
the voices meet
as the clash of steel on steel
Over the rights of possession and control and the points:
what is mine? what is yours?
and who says so?*

*The poor were divided into
the deserving and the undeserving and a
pioneer San Franciscan lacked words:
‘It’s hard enough to be poor
but to be poor and undeserving . . .’
He saw the slumborn illborn wearyborn from fathers and
mothers the same
out of rooms dank with rot
and scabs, rags, festerings, tubercles, chancres the very
doorway quavering,*

'What's the use?'

The drowning man in the river
answered the man on the bridge
'I don't want to die,

I'll lose my job in the molding room of
the Malleable Iron and Castings Works
And the living man on the bridge
hotfooted to the molding room foreman
of the Malleable Iron and Castings Works
and got a short answer:

'You're ten minutes late. The man who
pushed that fellow off the bridge
is already on the job.'

Carl Sandburg
The People, Yes (1936)

SONGBAG CONCERTS, WEBSITE, & FACEBOOK

Upcoming Songbag Concerts:

September 27—Dave Moore

October 25—Keith Reins & Tara McGovern

November 29—Small Potatoes

Visit our Carl Sandburg Historic Site Association website at sandburg.org for further information on the Songbag Concerts, membership information, Barbara Schock's "Sandburg's Hometown," past issues of *Inklings and Idlings*, and other CSHSA matters. Find the CSHSA on Facebook for Association news and comments.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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