



Carl Sandburg in Neponset, Illinois

Plaque Dedication, October 3, 2024

by Ed Safiran

One of Carl Sandburg's many jobs while growing up in Galesburg was selling stereoscopic views for the Underwood and Underwood Company. His Lombard College friend Fred Dickinson introduced Carl to an Underwood representative, and



in the summer of 1900, his territory for sales was all of Bureau County, Illinois. Sandburg wrote a chapter about his experiences selling "views" in the second volume of his autobiography *Ever the Winds of Chance* (University of Illinois Press, 1983). In it, he spends several pages describing his trip on his bicycle to Neponset in Western Bureau County. He describes the hotel he stayed in and how he canvased the main street and outlying farmsteads selling his wares.

Some years later, Sandburg wrote a poem about Neponset while he was traveling by train at night through town

along the CB&Q line. He described the Village of Neponset as “Clinging to the Burlington Main Line, like pea pods cling to stems.” The poem, which he called “Pods”, was published in 1920 in *Smoke and Steel* (Harcourt Brace & Co.,1920).



The Neponset Historical Society recently dedicated a historic marker from the Illinois State Historical Society about Sandburg’s time there. The marker is located on the site of the hotel where Sandburg stayed. The marker summarizes his time there and includes the poem “Pods.” The event took place on October 3, 2024, National Poetry Day, on Commercial Street in Neponset and drew a large crowd that included



students and the Junior High Band from Neponset Grade School. Speakers at the event included Willam Furry, Executive Director of the Illinois State Historical Society, Lex Poppens, Director of the Bureau County Historical Society, and Jim Eichler of RWE Clean Energy LLC who funded the project. Second and third grade students recited the poem “Pods” after the marker was unveiled.



The tiny town of Neponset definitely made an impression on young Sandburg. Penelope Niven, in her 1991 biography of Sandburg noted that he “liked the stereograph business,

and he got much more out of it than money. He liked the freedom of the open road, liked living here and there, seeing new towns and people. He liked bringing the world to the people in the isolated villages and on the prairie farms.”

The historical marker from the Illinois State Historical Society will raise awareness about a unique moment in Neponset history and will help keep the memory of Carl Sandburg’s time there alive for generations to come.

